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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

December 5, 1894.

No. 841.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXV.

GRAYDON'S DOUBLE DEAL;



OR, Trapping River Thieves

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CHAPTER I.

DARK WORK OF A DARK NIGHT.

A ROW-BOAT was steadily crossing the East River. It was an almost invisible spot on the wide stretch of water, for the night was cloudy and moonless. On the one shore the lights of the City of New York twinkled dimly, and on the other those of Brooklyn.

made a shining line. Well above the stream the great bridge seemed in an enchanted span to connect the twin cities.

The two persons in the boat had no such thoughts as these. Often had they been abroad under like circumstances, and as they had made the trip for which they had gone out they now gave heed only to getting ashore.

Suddenly, however, one of them lifted his head quickly.

"Another boat, Rod!" he exclaimed.

The man who was using the oars looked listlessly.

"Nearing us, aren't they?"

"Yes. We shall pass nigh them."

"All right."

The oarsman yawned, showing utter disregard of the situation.

"Mebbe they are river thieves," suggested the first speaker.

"Or Japanese man-o'-war's-men."

"You don't care a rap, I see, and I don't know as I do, either, fer the chances o' fun ahead are small. Here is this measly river jest alive with river pirates, an' me an' you go out often an' have no fun. I say it's mean!"

"Be calm, Skimmer. The pirates might sink us, if found, so be thankful we don't happen on them."

"But I want a racket—a real, out-an'-out racket, with a fringe of tragedy runnin' all around it. See? When life gets monotonous my blood kinder congeals, an'—Say! what's that?"

They had approached close to the second boat when there was an abrupt stir in the craft, and a voice sounded in a muffled cry of some sort. This brought something like a curse from one of the rowers, and he was seen to turn angrily on the person who had cried out.

The man who had been called "Rod" grew suddenly attentive.

"Did you hear that, Skimmer?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"It sounded ter me like a woman's screech."

"By Jove! we will see to it!"

The speaker gave his oars an extra pull and swept closer yet to the strangers.

"What have you got there?" he demanded.

"What in thunder is it to you?" was the retort.

"Who is that woman?"

"There ain't no woman here."

"I believe you lie. Pull up and let me see."

"You go ter blazes! Pull, lads!"

By this time only a few yards separated the two parties, and the investigators easily made out an object in the bottom of the second boat which was squirming lustily. That it was some person hampered by bonds was certain, and the cry had been that of a woman. Rod was determined to investigate, and was reckless of the odds against them. He was about to make an attack, but at that instant the prisoner rose partially and quickly changed the nature of the situation.

The shifting of weight was disastrous, with the river running so roughly, and a warning cry from the strangers was followed by the total upsetting of the boat.

Captors and captive were alike plunged into the water!

"Quick, Rod!" exclaimed Skimmer. "There will be a drownded woman, ef you don't."

Rod needed no urging. He had a quick mind, and it at once dawned upon him that the time was at hand to see who the captive was. More, she was in danger of losing her life, and he plied the oars with the skill of an old hand.

Luck favored him, and Skimmer suddenly reached out and seized hold of something.

"Here we are, old man!" he cheerfully added.

Rod gave his help, and a woman was drawn into the craft.

"Look!" cried Skimmer. "Them measly critters are gettin' off!"

It was plain that he referred to the captors, but Rod placidly answered:

"Let them go. We have what we wanted."

Skimmer was young and energetic, and

would gladly have wound up the adventure by capturing the men, but he yielded gracefully. From their burden came muffled cries. Rod caught at the situation and hastened to relieve her of the wraps that covered her face. This done they had a better view; but a new difficulty now appeared.

She was frightened, and, in unreasoning fear, tried to leap into the water again. Rod held her fast, while Skimmer muttered:

"Woman's logic!"

The woman in the case broke forth in coherent words.

"Don't kill me!" she wildly implored.

"Be calm!" urged Rod. "You are safe."

"Let me go! let me go!"

"Wait a little! Listen to me, and learn what the situation is. You are with friends, and your enemies are gone. You are safe. Understand that, and do not get nervous. You are safe, I say."

It needed the repetition, for she was thoroughly upset, but his earnest utterance finally sent conviction home to her troubled mind.

"Who—who are you?" she asked, tremulously.

"My name," plainly returned the oarsman, "is Rodney Proctor. My companion is Skimmer Nichols. What is more important, we are honest people who will see you back with your friends. I take it you have been abducted."

"Yes, oh! yes; they stole me away."

"Old foes, I dare say, who—"

"They were total strangers."

"Indeed? Well, you can tell me more anon, but this is no place for a long talk, especially as you are wet through. Rest easy while I put the boat ashore."

He sat down to the oars once more, and under his energetic strokes they were soon driven to the line of New York piers. He landed at one of these, and then both he and Skimmer climbed to the structure and took the woman up with them.

"Allow me to conduct you to yonder building," pursued Rodney. "It is the club-house of the boating club to which I belong, and there you will receive good usage from all, and, I think, be able to get dry clothing."

The woman shivered, and then followed him with perfect readiness.

"She is not a native of New York," thought the rescuer. "One bred here would not be so trustful with a stranger, even if he were a helper to the extent I have been."

The club-house happened to be nearly deserted, and Rodney was successful in conducting her to the reception-room without meeting any fellow members. There he had a surprise. He found her to be young and far from bad looking. She was slight of figure and seemed to lack in resolution, but that was natural after what had happened.

"Take a seat by the fire," directed the rescuer, "and I will see if any of our lady friends have left clothing here."

"I don't care for that," exclaimed the girl.

"But you are wet through—"

"Never mind; I only ask that you will take me to my friends."

"Where is your home?"

"I have none."

"Then where am I to take you?"

"To my mother. She is somewhere—"

The speaker fumbled in her pocket, and then brought out a card.

"Here is the address," she added. "We have but lately gone there—"

"Pardon me, but are you a stranger in New York?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I think you told me that the men on the river were wholly unknown to you?"

"That is the fact, sir."

"How came you with them?"

"They stole me."

"Where? When?"

"Somewhere on the street this evening, at about nine o'clock."

Rodney Proctor's face darkened for a moment. He did not have the highest opinion of a young woman who would be on the street under circumstances which made abduction possible.

"What were you doing there?" he asked bluntly.

"I went out with my mother on business, and she left me on the street while she went

for a moment to see if she could find a gentleman whose help she wanted. Before she returned the men came, and they seized up, on me and bore me away to the river, and took me off in the boat. That is all I know."

Rodney grew less severe of look. This girl was a small and delicate person, and though she seemed to be nearly or quite twenty years old, she had the general air of a child. Generously enough, he set her down as one who knew as little of the world as she did of New York.

"You shall be returned to your mother immediately," he pursued, looking at the card. "I see this has the name of Mrs. Comber—"

"She is the landlady at the house. My name is Hope Trull."

"An odd name!" murmured Rodney, half unconsciously.

"Yes, sir."

Hope assented with her peculiar childish air, and the rescuer continued to regard her closely. He had been born and bred in New York, but had never met any one who resembled her greatly. She was plainly as intelligent as any of the world-wise ladies of the metropolis, and her childish way was charming, the young man thought.

Skimmer had come in and was standing at one side. He watched both of the others curiously.

"Extremes meet," he thought. "She is like a pet kitten, an' Rod is a muscular Hercules."

He was not so far wrong. Hope has been spoken of. Proctor was a rich man of twenty-five years, but he had always possessed a passion for water craft, and, since he had joined the boat-club, he had been renowned as its most devoted member. Night and day he was to be seen on the East River, and he was no mean oarsman.

Rodney aroused.

"We lose valuable time," he added. "You must go to your mother at once. I think we can find dry clothing—"

The girl shrank back.

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "I will remain as I am."

"But you may catch cold."

"I shall not. I—I am very much obliged, but I will keep these garments on."

"Danged ef she ain't afraid!" muttered Skimmer. "Anybody would think we was goin' ter rob her of a million. Wonder ef she ain't got somethin' precious—diamonds or cash—in her wardrobe?"

Hope had shown a species of dismay, and Rodney saw the fact as plainly as Skimmer, but he let it drop.

"I will call a carriage, and by its help we can soon reach the house," he added.

"I prefer to go on foot," answered Hope.

"But your wet clothes—"

"I do not mind them."

Rodney was observing enough to see that, though he had posed as a rescuer, the young woman did not care to enter the carriage with him, and he let it go as she wished. He did insist upon her adding a cloak to her apparel, and, when this was done, they set out. Skimmer remained at the club-house, where he was a general helper.

"Rod's got a little dove under his wing," muttered Skimmer. "He seems ter like et, too. Wal, let him have her. She's as soft in her ways as a flim-flammer when he's seekin' victims, but I can't git it out o' my noddle that Hope ain't all dove. Rod may have her; she ain't my style. I'd ruther have a boundin' gazelle o' the woolly Bowery."

It was not the most elevated of tastes, but Skimmer had been reared near the Bowery, and was true to his kind. Perhaps, too, he would change his views when time had brought the first down to his lip, for he was still a boy.

Rodney acted the part of guide with success, and the young couple drew near the locality where Hope made her transient home.

She explained on the way that she and her mother had been in the city less than a week, and gave the idea that they had come on important business, but she was cautious about telling what it was.

Rodney could not avoid feeling an interest, and, when the humble house was reached, he waited with impatience for their ring to be answered.

CHAPTER II.

A WOMAN WITH A MISSION.

A MATTER-OF-FACT servant girl soon appeared, and Rodney and Hope went to the parlor. The latter did not seem to have any ideas of her own, but the young man talked for her.

"Is Mrs. Trull in?" he asked of the servant.

"Yes. She came in a few minutes ago."

Rodney looked at Hope, as passive as ever, and added:

"Please tell her we are here."

"I'll do it directly. I'll go—"

There was a rustling of skirts and heavy breathing, and a woman entered the room. She stopped short at sight of the others, and Rodney had a good chance to see her. She was middle-aged and stout of build, but not unpleasant to look at. She had a full, well-colored face, shapely of outline, and of strength and power. Her dress was that of one well to do, but scarcely fashionable.

Rodney set her down as the landlady, and he was rather surprised to see Hope flutter over to her side.

"Oh! mother, mother!" cried the girl.

She would have nestled against the broad breast of her new companion, but the latter held her off at arm's-length.

"Where have you been?" was her severe question.

"Oh! mother, I have been in trouble, in danger—"

"You had no business to do it!" snapped the stout lady.

Rodney had not for a moment connected her with Hope until he heard her given the maternal title, for Hope seemed to call for a mother slight and delicate, while this woman was virile, muscular and resolute; but he now knew she was Mrs. Trull, and as she seemed inclined to take her daughter to task he moved to the rescue.

"Madam," he interposed, "allow your daughter to explain, and you will see that she is not to blame. She has been in serious difficulty—"

"Abducted!" put in Hope.

"Abducted!" echoed Mrs. Trull.

"Stolen by city toughs," added Rodney. "They were bearing her away when it was my good fortune to save her from their power."

Mrs. Trull was interested, but there was no motherly agitation about it. She looked not at Hope, but at Proctor.

"Who were these men?" she demanded.

"City thugs. They doubtless belonged to a class who infest New York and are ever ready to pounce upon a victim, regardless of whom it may be."

"No!" declared Mrs. Trull. "If my daughter has been abducted, it was the work of Montgomery Call, not that of the men you name."

"Oh, mother!" cried Hope.

Rodney did not know who Montgomery Call was, so he stood politely silent. Mrs. Trull had an overbearing manner which did not impress him favorably, anyhow.

"Tell me all about this," commanded the elder woman.

Between Hope and Rodney the story was told. Mrs. Trull set her lips in a straight line and heard all. She had nothing to say until all was told. Then she burst forth with the exclamation:

"We placed our lives in peril when we came to this city!"

"Oh! mother!" again exclaimed Hope.

"Now, don't get silly," commanded Mrs. Trull. "How often have I directed you to cultivate courage?"

"How can I, when things are so horrid?" weakly replied the daughter.

"Pattern after me," was the sturdy response. "I think you understand all this. Montgomery Call has learned of our arrival, and he is bound to slay us."

"But you said he hadn't courage enough—I mean, you used to say so," sighed Hope.

"I have found out otherwise. He is a scheming man, and such a person is capable of all things when he sets his mind to it."

Rodney was listening to private affairs, and he was just thinking of announcing his departure when Mrs. Trull turned upon him.

"You have frustrated a murder, sir," she added.

"If the case is as desperate as that, I am, indeed, glad I was able to interfere tonight."

"The man who is the evil genius of our lives has evaded our search since we reached New York, but it seems he has had his own eyes open. A desperate wretch!"

"If he has attempted violence to Miss Trull I would advise that you have a warrant sworn out for him immediately."

"We don't know where he is."

"The City Directory—"

"Does not contain his name."

"I infer that you wish to find him—"

"You infer quite right, young man; we do wish it!" snapped muscular Mrs. Trull.

"Probably he has injured you before—"

"I am his wife, and he ran away from me!" declared the lady, with an air of profound indignation.

Rodney was not prepared for this, and he murmured some platitude and wished he was out of the room. The elderly lady, however, was not ready to let him go. In point of fact, she knew she needed some outside help, and, not having been too much wrapped up in her indignation to miss seeing that Proctor cast numerous commiserating glances toward Hope, she decided to make an effort to secure his co-operation.

"That infamous man, Montgomery Call," she explained, "came to Europe, where I was abiding with my aged father, twenty-one years ago. He called himself Simeon Trull, then, and he won my love by patient effort, cajolery and falsehood. I married him. That is our daughter!"

She paused long enough to make a rapid motion toward Hope, and then resumed rapidly:

"Two years later he deserted us, and we were years in getting trace of him. Finally the truth came to us. I learned his real name, and that he resided in this city, and I packed up my few effects and crossed the ocean. I am here for justice—justice and revenge!"

Rodney felt, as he noticed the tightening of her firm lips, that he was glad he was not in Montgomery Call's shoes. Mrs. Trull would not make a pleasant enemy.

"Pardon me," he replied, "but why should he seek to abduct Miss Hope, his own child? If, as you suspect, he did so with the intention of—you said, killing her—is it not a radical step, if there is no more to it than his desertion of you?"

"It is not all there is to it."

"That is different."

"Very different."

Mrs. Trull clasped her hands and walked across the room in a thoughtful manner. Rodney believed she was meditating on the advisability of telling him all about the troubles of the past, but the plan was not carried out. She finally stopped again in front of the caller.

"You belong in this city?" she added. "Tell me how to find the man I seek."

"You are sure he is here?"

"Yes; very sure."

"Then you had better call a detective into the case. I am ready to aid you all I can, but my skill would be small in comparison with that of a professional man-hunter."

"Possibly you are right. I will think of it, for Montgomery Call must be run down."

"Mother," interpolated Hope, "tell him of the money, and the murder done in England—"

Mrs. Trull turned hotly on her daughter.

"Miss," she cried, "hold your tongue!"

Hope collapsed and said no more, but Rodney had been given a new interest in the game. A case which had murder attached to it was no trifling affair. He had been disposed to think lightly of Mrs. Trull before, for she was not a woman to command quick sympathy; but he lost that disposition at once. Murder was a rallying cry which brought matters out of the ordinary course of events, and that, too, most decidedly.

He surveyed the two women, but Hope had again collapsed, and Mrs. Trull was equal to the emergency.

"My child refers to things which occurred in England," she serenely continued; "things which do not concern us."

It was a falsehood and Rodney knew it, but he made no denial. He was content to

let the ruling spirit of the hour have full sway."

"We want to find Montgomery Call," resumed Mrs. Trull. "What can you suggest?"

She was calling on Rodney with the off-hand imperiousness of a mistress addressing a servant, but the young man took it with equanimity.

"I can only suggest that you get the detective, as I before advised, and let him use his wits, aided by a full understanding of the facts of the case. Mr. Call is likely to be in a certain sphere of life. The detective must know that sphere—"

"He was rich."

"So much gained. You must tell the detective all—"

"Oh! mother, don't!" exclaimed Hope.

Mrs. Trull gave the girl another look which made her relapse into silence, and then addressed Rodney with decision.

"I want to do without the detective—at least, I wish to hunt well for Call before summoning aid. Can't you assist me—and my poor Hope?"

The speaker suddenly grew pathetic—a role she was not well qualified to fill; and she indicated Hope with much tragic eloquence of gesture. Somewhat to her surprise she was not rebuffed.

"Well, madam, I will do what I can," agreed Rodney. "It will be new business to me, and I am not sure of my ability, but what I can do shall be done willingly. The hour is now late, and I remember that Miss Trull is still in her damp clothes. Allow me to suggest that it will be best to see to her now, and let me call in the morning to consult with you."

Mrs. Trull hesitated for a moment, and then fell in with the plan. Proctor improved the chance to take his leave, which he did amidst the thanks of mother and daughter.

Once on the street he found ample food for thought.

"I don't understand them fully. Both are out of the ordinary run of people, and novel in their way. Mrs. Trull does not impress me favorably, and I would eschew them wholly were it not for Hope. She is a meek, harmless little thing, and deserves sympathy. I suspect she does not get much of it from her mother, if mother she is—and I really aspire to look into the case. I'll do it, too! Why not, with the mystery which surrounds it to urge me on?"

He tried to remember all he had heard.

"Mrs. Call, or Trull, claims to be hunting a runaway husband. If she gets him he will have to suffer for his sins, for she has the will of an Indian, and hate to correspond. Then, there is her unwillingness to tell her story in full—yes, and the allusion to some murder case. That's an ugly word. Shall I find an ugly case beyond?"

CHAPTER III.

DRIVEN TO DESPERATION.

THE convict sat in his cell. His head was bowed, and his manner was one of deep dejection. The walls of Sing Sing were around him, grim and strong. Always hateful to him, they tortured him now.

He suddenly rose and began to walk the room with quick, nervous steps, his face working with emotion.

"Why does no news come?" he exclaimed. "I have been put on the rack of suspense, and now I am left in the dark. Rachel said she would notify me further, but I hear nothing. Can the prison officials be holding the communication back? But no; they are aware of my situation, and they would not be so unfeeling as to torture me needlessly—they promised me they would not. All may yet be well, but the time goes with horrible slowness. It is possible that—Ah!"

He stopped short with a sharp aspiration. There had been sounds outside his cell, and the door now opened. A jailer was there, stolid and grim, but his appearance quickly aroused a species of storm. The convict noticed that in his hand he carried a letter, and he sprung toward the official like a panther.

His eyes blazed, and he reached out both hands eagerly.

"Here, here!" he cried.

The jailer receded.

"Keep off!" he cautioned.

"Quick, quick!" exclaimed the convict.

"No tantrums now, or I shall make you sweat for it."

"The letter, the letter! Don't you see what I mean? The letter! Is it from her? Give it to me!"

"Oh! so that is what you want, is it? You leaped at me like a wild animal, and I thought you were on a revolt. Yes, I guess the letter is for you. Name, Oliver C. Graydon—"

The speaker was looking leisurely at the superscription, but the convict unceremoniously snatched the letter from his grasp.

"Well, that's cool!" cried the jailer.

"My wife, my wife!" panted Graydon.

There was no need of breaking the seal, for the officials of the prison had done that, and he read with feverish haste. Even the jailer, accustomed as he was to such scenes, found something worth observing in the play of the convict's features. Their expression gradually became less tense and agitated, and he followed the reading of the last words with the exclamation:

"Providence be praised!"

"You seem to be pleased," remarked the jailer.

"I am. Have you a wife?"

"No."

"Then you will not fully understand; but this I will say: I am blessed with a wife, dear and true, but separated from me by the unjust chance which put me within these walls. Imprisonment has been hard for me to bear, but my own sufferings have been nothing compared with other things."

"No?"

"My wife and daughter have been enduring poverty and hardship, and the ill health of the one made the constant care and attention of the other necessary. This has been the sting of my incarceration here—to know that they—my loved ones—were in poverty, and one of them in ill health. Oh! it has been a terrible burden!"

Graydon took a quick, nervous turn about the room, while the jailer looked on with passive interest. The convict had a fine, strong face, and his manner was that of one well above the average of men as to intellect—a man who appeared born to command—yet he was so unassuming a prisoner that the jailer thought well of him in his passive way. If convicts had not been so numerous he might even have pitied Oliver Graydon, but the prison was full of men like him, as far as prison stripes went.

Now, the jailer had a curious thought as he watched the pacing man.

"He is like Napoleon! Strong of body and mind, and mighty impressive all through. If some of our public men had his looks and ways it would benefit them mightily."

Then the jailer spoke aloud.

"You should have thought of your wife and daughter before you did that which took you into this living grave."

Oliver Graydon stopped and confronted his companion.

"Man!" he cried, passionately, "I came here innocent of all crime—I am as innocent now as you are!"

The jailer shrugged his shoulders; he had heard talk like this before. Graydon caught his arm.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "I was in business, and at the head of a great undertaking relative to Western lands. It was reputable in all ways, and feasible, too. If it could have been carried on it would have brought riches to all connected with it. Unfortunately, I had an enemy. His name was Walker Crosby. He hated me because I had thwarted his ambition to become a county officer in a political campaign. He sought his revenge; he had it!"

"Graydon, I shall have to leave—"

"One moment! Walker Crosby was the cause of my downfall. He set out to ruin me, and he did it. I need not follow the course of his plot, but he worked it well. He made me seem a defaulter and falsifier, and that brought me here, sentenced for five years. Worse, as far as the bearing of it is concerned, he took away the little money I had, so my wife and daughter have been hard pressed."

"Never mind the story—"

"A moment more. Luckily the old home remained, and they have lived there, free from actual want, but always facing poverty. Now, my poor wife has had an accident,

and news of it has worried me terribly. There was an explosion of some sort of chemical, and her eyesight was thought to be gone. Thank Providence! this letter from my daughter now tells me they expect to save her eyes."

"That's lucky."

"Lucky? It is the blessing of the Almighty Father! How I have worried over it! You don't know; you can't imagine—"

"Graydon," interrupted the jailer, "a visitor waits to see you."

"A visitor? Has not my daughter—not Rachel?"

"A man."

The brief light died out of the convict's face.

"Who is it?" he asked, indifferently.

"He said there was no name, but that his business was important."

Graydon shrugged his shoulders.

"Some missionary, I suppose; nobody else to be expected, now Rachel is kept close to my poor wife. I will not see this person—Still, why not? Good may possibly come out of it. Yes," added the convict bitterly, "and I possibly may get water from a rock, too. Show him up."

The speaker turned away. He was too indifferent to care whether the visitor came or not. Long before he had ceased to look for good news, and his hopeless condition had led him to refrain from insisting on learning the man's name. He thought he did not care who it was.

He resumed his seat and the jailer went out.

Presently footsteps sounded outside the cell and the door was reopened. Somebody came in. Oliver Graydon did not raise his head. Sitting with his gaze on the floor he ignored the caller. Evidently the latter was willing to wait, also, and, as realization of this fact came to the prisoner, he changed his manner.

"Well, what is it?"

He spoke sharply, imperiously, and as he spoke he suddenly turned his head. He saw the visitor.

He had planned to keep his seat and be coldly indifferent, but he did nothing of the sort. He looked, and then leaped quickly to his feet. His face flushed and then paled; he looked, and his eyes were expanded and strange of appearance.

Before him was a tall, ungainly man who had a sharp, hollow face and a sneering smile. No stranger he, and Oliver Graydon was stirred deeply as he looked.

A timid man might well have felt uneasy under the prisoner's regard, but the visitor was not of that stripe. Perceiving that he was fully noticed and recognized, he advanced closer to Graydon, his smile dying away and leaving his angular face cold, crafty and repellent.

"Well, well," he spoke, "we meet again, do we?"

"Not by any wish of mine!" retorted Graydon.

"So I am not welcome?"

"You are not!"

"I did not expect I should be; I did not come to tickle your fancy. Jail-birds are not just in my line, Graydon."

The convict's face began to work with fresh emotion, and his eyes had the look of an animal, when hunted down. He made a strong effort to command himself, however. Almost inaudibly he inquired:

"Why are you here?"

"First to see your quarters."

The visitor surveyed the bleak walls of the cell with feigned interest, and a little of the old, sneering smile reappeared.

"Not luxurious," he commented.

"Walker Crosby, you do not need to be troubled thereby."

"I am not. I only wanted to see how jail-birds live."

"Stop!" cried Graydon. "You are alone with me; do not revile me too much. You know well how I came here; you know it was your accursed malevolence and perjury that did it all. I know I was not guilty of the charge brought against me, and that it was you who swore my life and honor away. Ay, you robbed me of freedom, home, wife, child. Do not push me too far now—for your own safety, do not!"

"You would do—what?"

"Heaven only knows! I might—" the

convict paused, hesitated, and then added huskily and intensely: "I might kill you, you infamous scoundrel!"

Walker Crosby was a man of nerve, but he prudently backed toward the door.

"The same old spirit," he remarked; "mind of abnormal ferocity, and heart of crime. Killing is a serious matter, my man."

"And what is it to rob one of home, family, all he holds dear?"

Hot was the question, and Crosby manifested some degree of discontent with the subject. He hated Graydon, and was glad to taunt him, but he did not enjoy reproaches which hit the mark so well.

"Enough of this," he pursued; "I did not come for idle talk. I came on business. Graydon, what do you know about the title to Highridge Cottage?"

The convict looked puzzled.

"I don't understand."

"You are the reputed owner of that cottage—perhaps I should say that your wife and daughter are the reputed owners, for they reside there, and you—well, you reside here. As I said before, or intimated, the title rests with you. Is it legal?"

Oliver Graydon had been perplexed. He was not enlightened now, but he knew Crosby, and doubts swept over him—fears for the future.

"What do you mean?" he asked, huskily.

"Before now men have given deeds to property to which they had no clear title. You bought of one Moses Ernest. I think Moses defrauded you. Here is the proof."

The speaker drew a paper from his pocket and flourished it before Graydon's eyes. It might have been a very innocent paper, but it had an official look, and this, combined with the convict's knowledge of Walker Crosby and his ways, made him feel uneasy.

"Why do you mention the matter?" asked Graydon. "What do you know or care about it?"

"Well," explained the visitor, an unpleasant smile stealing over his face, "circumstances led me to believe that Moses Ernest never had a clear title to what he sold you, so I went to Judge Horman about it. You know him, and you know his opinion is substantial and reliable."

"Yes."

The judge looked it up, and he found it was as I had thought. Moses never had any right to the property. His title being bogus, of course yours is not good for anything in law."

Oliver Graydon was breathing hard.

"Well?" he spoke, tensely.

"The property was a fine one," pursued Crosby, coolly, "so, when I found you had no right to it, I decided to buy it myself. I did so. Here is my deed. I own it all."

"Own it all!" almost shouted the convict.

"My God! man, what of me?"

Crosby smiled his satisfaction.

"You own nothing."

"But I paid four thousand dollars for the estate."

"More fool you. You should have paid the owner, not Moses Ernest, who had no rights to bargain away. Your money has gone up in smoke, and I—well, I own your supposed homestead."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONVICT'S STRONG HAND.

WALKER CROSBY was calm and cool, but he could not prevent the vein of evil satisfaction which was visible in his manner. Convict Graydon knew what that meant. Crosby had been his bitter foe, and he knew, even if he could not prove it, that the fact that he was a prisoner in Sing Sing was all owing to Crosby's fiendish plots. Now, it did not need any explanation to assure him that the old foe had new designs on him and his family.

Graydon was very pale, and when he took a forward step he was the incarnation of agitation and passion.

"Man, you lie!" he cried, hotly. "You—you own my house? I say it is a lie!"

Crosby tapped the paper with his finger.

"This deed says otherwise."

"How can you own what I have bought and paid for?"

"You have no legal title."

"But the moral right—"

Crosby shrugged his shoulders.

"Does not weigh one iota in the case."

The convict suddenly grew unnaturally calm.

"What do you intend to do?"

"Occupy my new house."

"But my family—"

"They can easily get an expressman to move their belongings."

"To what place?"

"Where they choose; that is nothing to me."

"Am I to understand that you are going to drive them out?"

"I have an offer from tenants who are sure to pay their rent," calmly replied Crosby, "and as your wife is not sure to do it—she is now on her bed from the effects of an accident, and the accident will doubtless make her blind, anyhow, so I can take no chances—I am going to accept the new tenant."

"Walker Crosby, you have come all this distance to tell me you are going to deprive my wife and daughter of their only home!" cried the convict, trembling with emotion.

"My home, you mean," corrected Crosby.

"They are to be driven out?"

"They are to give way to new tenants."

"Where will they go?"

"Bless me, how do I know?" and Crosby lifted his brows in assumed surprise.

"Do you know they are poor and helpless? My wife is ill, and all falls on Rachel, and she can't work when she has her mother to provide for."

"That is not my affair."

"Yet, you would drive them out."

"I am to take in a new tenant."

"And they must go?"

"Yes."

Walker Crosby still tried to be phlegmatic, but he was so full of despicable exultation that he could not hide it. Joy streamed all over his mean face, and it was clear that he took the greatest delight in forcing his companion into a greater depth of misery than he had tasted already.

The prisoner could not be calm. With his wife and daughter thus menaced he was desperate. He was serving time for a crime of which he was not guilty, and the one comfort had been that his loved ones were not exactly suffering bodily ills resultant from poverty.

Now, this poor consolation was to be lost.

"Walker Crosby, are you human?" he demanded.

"Very?"

"You hate me, and you have put me into living death, but, for the sake of my wife and child, do not go further."

"They are nothing to me," calmly replied Crosby.

"They may starve—"

"That, too, does not concern me."

"Devil! Inhuman monster!"

"Suit yourself as to epithets."

Oliver Graydon clasped his hands in wild entreaty.

"I beg of you—I beseech you, do not crush these helpless women!"

The visitor touched the paper.

"Here is a just and legal deed. It gives me full rights to the property now wrongfully occupied by your wife and child, and my rights shall be seen to. Out go your pack of women!"

Venomously Crosby hissed the words, and the convict was stirred to fury. He made a leap toward his enemy, seeking to gain possession of the deed. Crosby was alert, however, and he saved it from the rush.

"Off!" he ordered. "Keep away from me, knave, or I'll have you deprived of your commutation for good behavior. Off!"

He was seeking to wrest his arm from Graydon's hold, but he did not succeed. In the frenzy of the moment the convict did not recollect that he could not help his own cause by destroying the deed and he was mad to get it and tear it into pieces.

The paper was kept out of his reach, so he adopted a new device. He tripped Crosby and fell upon him.

"Now will you give it up?" he hissed.

"Never!"

"The paper, the paper!"

"Free me, free me! What, ho!—help, help! This way! Help!"

"Dog! I will give you all the help you need!"

The convict had lost the last measure of self control. He seized Crosby by the throat and closed his muscular hands.

"Die, scoundrel! Die!"

"Help! He-e-elph!"

It was a feeble sound now, and the visitor bade fair to succumb to the mad attack, but this was not the end. The jailer had already been guilty of some irregularities in allowing the visit, and he had not forgotten the man he had conducted there. He now came strolling back and pushed the cell-door open. What he saw astounded him.

Graydon had been accounted a very peaceful prisoner, and yet he had a man near his death.

The jailer leaped forward and dragged the convict from his victim.

"Great Caesar's ghost! what you mean by this?" he cried. "Would you do murder?"

"Yes, I would!" hotly retorted Graydon. "Let me at the wretch, and I will show you what I would do."

"Well, I guess not. This sort of thing has gone far enough; yes, it has gone too far for your own good. There will be a day of reckoning on this, when a prisoner assaults a visitor."

The burly form of the jailer was between Crosby and his indignant enemy, and the courage of the visitor grew apace.

"You scoundrel!" he exclaimed, "you have failed in your work, but it would be better for you if you had succeeded."

"I wish I had!" panted the convict.

"I live, and I will make you smart for this. That house will be emptied now in short order. Do you see this deed? It never has been recorded, and this is the only copy in existence, but there will soon be due record made." Then—ah! then I will fire your pack of women out, be it even at the dead of night!"

The jailer pushed the visitor back.

"Get away with your vindictiveness!" he commanded. "If you have been talking this way, I don't blame Graydon so very much for doing as he has—"

"He stirred me to the quick!" put in the convict, huskily.

"Well, you evened matters up by trying to kill him. If I had not come in it would have been a murder, sure. Bad, bad. Graydon, I shall have to report this, and I reckon you will get it hot from the boss."

"Report him, of course," urged Crosby. "Have him lashed—ay, give him a full hundred stripes. Lash him until he is raw. And in the meanwhile I will go and oust his females from their unlawful habitation."

It was the meanest and most despicable of flings, but Graydon had to bear it meekly. The jailer was between him and his foe. Meekly he did bear it, as far as decisive action was concerned, but the light in his eyes became like a raging fire.

"Walker Crosby!" he panted, "if you do this thing and I live to leave these walls, I will kill you!"

Again the visitor thought it best to fall back a little.

"The world has not a bigger scoundrel than you," pursued the convict, with energy. "I am in this cell simply because you lied and swore my life away. It was not enough for you, and now you would strike my loved ones. Villain—reptile—vulture!"

"Free your mind!" snapped Crosby, his sallow cheeks flushing. "It is all you can do. I can do more; I can throw your wife out of doors, and I'll do it. Yes, and it shall be quickly done. Over by the Hudson River a boat rests by the bank. At ten o'clock, to-night, I am to be there, when I shall be rowed across by a man hired for the purpose. As soon as I am thus under way I shall use all diligence to get to your so-called home. Then—then, my jail-bird, I'll throw your women out, even if they die at the door. What if they are blind and sick? So much the better. They are the more likely to die when I tumble them off of the door-step!"

Rapidly and venomously the man poured forth this speech, eager to stir the convict to the utmost. He did not fail.

All the passion of Graydon's nature was aroused anew, and he checked further words decisively.

He again leaped forward to attack his

enemy, and was prevented by the jailer only after a fierce struggle.

"Back, back!" commanded the jailer.

"No, no!—do not stop me. Let me at him!—let me at him!"

"Keep off! What would you do?"

"Kill him! It will come some time; let it come now, before he has done more of his fiendish work."

The muscular jailer pushed the convict back, and then turned to Walker Crosby.

"Get out!" he ordered.

The visitor was not sorry to go; he had at last been impressed with the idea that he was safest well away from Oliver Graydon, and as he had vented his spite, already, and made known his infamous plan to strike at the helpless women whom Graydon loved, he had no more to delay him. He went; the jailer followed quickly; the door closed and the convict was alone.

He had followed as far as the door, but was stopped by the barrier; then he suddenly lost the fictitious strength which had come from his mental frenzy. Weak and unnerfed, he sank in a heap on his bed.

"Lost! lost!" he groaned.

He had been known as a resolute prisoner, outwardly, but it was all over now. In the worst of his misfortunes he had been held up by the knowledge that his loved ones had a roof over them, and that, though they might be hard pressed, at times, they were not likely to suffer severely. All that was gone. They were to be rendered homeless, and he was powerless to save them.

For a time he was wholly unmanned, for he loved his family well; but his was not a weak nature. He grew stronger, spurred on by passionate feeling. He had known of old what Walker Crosby was, but the newest revelation of his malevolence was maddening.

"Is there no way to frustrate his plot?" wondered the unhappy man. "I have no relatives who can act in time, and my wife has none. Even if she had them they could not baffle Crosby. There is no way it could be done—"

He paused, rose and stood with a darkening face.

"By my life! if I were free I would find a way to do it!"

He walked the length of the cell with hurried steps.

"Freedom! What would it not be worth to me now?"

He glared at the door as if it were a personal enemy. If he could only pass it. He seized hold of it and shook it fiercely.

"Accursed barrier!" he exclaimed. "Would that I had the strength of Samson to make my way hence. I could save my wife—But why do I dream? I am helpless, and Crosby will work his will."

Again the thought fired him.

"If I could only escape! If I could—"

He paused, hesitated and flushed with the intensity of his feelings. The idea was not to be put down.

"Others have escaped; why not I? The chances are a thousand to one, yet the thousandth chance often succeeds. By heavens! I will try it! Yes, let the result be what it may, it shall be tried. I will attack the jailer—I will escape or die in trying!"

CHAPTER V.

THE RIVER TRAGEDY.

DARKNESS had fallen, and the shores of the Hudson were dim and dusky. There was no moon, and the stars found it difficult to force their light through the canopy of misty clouds.

At the point to which attention is now called the river seemed deserted and commonplace, and the silence was marked. Presently, however, this was changed in a measure. Not that the silence was broken, but through the gloom a man came with nervous, apprehensive air and uncertain steps.

He skulked, rather than walked naturally, and his whole air was that of one seeking to avoid notice from others.

He paused close to the river and looked out over the water.

"Shall I try to swim it?" he muttered.

It was his wish to cross, but he did not seem equal to the task. His strength was less than usual, from various causes.

If there had been light to allow of a searching scrutiny it would have been seen that his clothing was torn and rumpled—more, that the garments were of the striped color so indelibly associated with the prison a mile away. He looked back toward that point with a fresh show of nervousness.

"I must get across somehow, for they will soon be on my track. There will be a great outcry when it is known that a prisoner has escaped from Sing Sing, and I must make good use of my time. Capture may come to me finally, but before I surrender I must see my wife and child. Somehow, that monster, Walker Crosby, must be baffled. Ah! what's that?"

He had heard a sound, and he looked hurriedly to see its cause.

"A man! I am pursued!"

The speaker shrunk back. He would have fled, but he dared not. It was certain that such a movement on his part would bring prompt discovery, so he stood still.

The unknown man advanced, stumbling over the rough ground in the darkness. He came so close to the first wanderer that he might have seen him had he looked. He gave attention, however, only to the slight rise which marked the bank of the river. Bending, he looked for something there. Then he rose and looked toward the east.

"The boat is here," he muttered, "but, where is the boatman?"

"Ah-h-h!"

The skulker breathed the sound in a long-drawn gasp. He had made a discovery, and it almost overwhelmed him.

"It is Walker Crosby! Why has he come? Is he aiding the prison officials to capture me? But, no; I remember he said he was to be rowed across the river, and that the boat awaited his use. He has come to cross. I can't leave here until his boatman comes, so I must keep my place. Queer that I should be here alone with him!"

The chance thought brought new thoughts to him. His cheeks flushed and his eyes glittered.

"Alone with him!"

Hotly his blood seemed to shoot through his veins. A dangerous train of thought had been started.

"Nobody else is near, and I am alone with the man who goes to ruin my loved ones and bring them to want through devilish malice. If I let him go he will vent his hatred on my poor wife and beggar her—if I let him go!"

There was much in the thought. Oliver Graydon had escaped from Sing Sing by a curious combination of good luck and violence, but he had not done fatal injury to any one. He had not wanted to. Now, the course of his meditations was very different.

Never was a hungry tiger more eager to spring on its victim than was Grayson to attack his pitiless foe. He could hardly keep himself in check until he had formed his plan. He was not fit to form a plan, anyway, for there was nothing like method in his feelings—only the fierce, hot hatred of Walker Crosby, and his desire to stop that man's revengeful purposes.

Graydon was mad at that moment—mad as any man in an insane asylum.

Crosby grew impatient. He looked frequently toward the east.

"Why don't he come?" was his peevish inquiry, aloud. "If I could row well I would not wait for the fellow. Hang these country boors! they never care how much they delay a gentleman. I want to get across. Yes," added the speaker, with a chuckle, "I want to get over and throw Graydon's wife out of doors!"

It was a fatal remark. It deprived the escaped convict of his last atom of self-control, and he acted with startling promptness. With a light spring he gained Crosby's side. He clutched his enemy's arm.

"You will deal with me, first!" he hissed.

Crosby was both frightened and staggered, but as soon as he could get his balance, he excitedly cried:

"What's this?—what's this? Let me go! Who are you?"

"Scoundrel! don't you know?" demanded Graydon, shaking his prey with relentless hands.

"Robbers, robbers!"

"You fool! I do not crave your money. I want more. Mumbling wretch, have you

so lost your senses that you do not know Oliver Graydon?"

"What?"

The word passed the old man's lips in a sort of shriek. He forgot for the moment that the man named was supposed to be in prison, and, recognizing the voice, he was filled with terror.

"It is my turn now!" added the convict, with savage joy. "You have had your day; it is my day now. Revenge is mine!"

Crosby tried to escape, but the grasp upon him was like iron. He was like a child in the younger man's hands.

"You are alone with the man whose family you would ruin!" added Graydon, with terrible power.

"Let me go, let me go!" gasped Crosby.

"To throw my wife out of doors?"

"No, no; I will not do it."

"You boasted of your intention but just now."

"I did not mean it; I would not harm them. I was only jesting—I promised them to save the old homestead for them—"

"Liar!"

"Let me go and ask them—"

"You will not have the chance. Do you think you can blind me? You showed your true colors when in my cell, and words will not avail you now. I know you, and the hour of settlement has come."

"Let me go!" panted Crosby. "Let me go and—"

"No! You blood-sucker, I am bound to stop your career."

"You would not harm me—"

"Do you think so?"

"I will go to your wife and—"

"Never! You recall your own will, and you shall be dealt with accordingly. Scoundrel! you would ruin me, would you?"

In the madness of the moment Graydon bent the older man backward and clasped his throat. What his intention really was he never could tell afterward; he merely knew that he had his foe in his power, and the blood ran riot in his veins.

Crosby was excited to the utmost. Convinced that his life was in danger, he stirred himself to save it. Desperation gave him new strength, and he remembered, too, that he was not wholly unarmed. He carried a knife which was large beyond the average of pocket-knives, and this he drew and tried to open.

His head began to swim from the pressure on his throat, but he accomplished his end at last. The blade was thrown back, and he swung the weapon up.

Graydon was suddenly stirred from his own purpose as he felt the prick of the steel in his side. He realized the situation at once, and his hands were withdrawn from Crosby's neck. He clutched at the knife-hand and found a grip. He wrested the weapon away.

Crosby realized that he had lost his chief reliance, and acting on the spur of the moment, reversed matters by seizing his companion by the throat. It was a firm grasp, and the convict forgot all except that he was fighting a desperate battle. He threw the knife up and struck with all his force—not once, merely, but time and again. His hand was not stayed until he realized that Crosby lay limp in his grasp.

Then reason suddenly returned.

He ceased to strike, and his gaze studied the motionless form in his arms. The scrutiny brought a fresh conviction, sharpened by the fact that his left hand was wet with some suggestive fluid.

He released his hold and the still limp form fell to the earth. Graydon looked down upon it, waiting for it to stir, but as it did not move he gained more light. His hands rose to his eyes; he brushed them across his face as if to clear some substance away, and then abruptly, tragically clasped them to his forehead.

"Dead!" he exclaimed. "Dead!"

Nobody confirmed or denied the assertion. All was still except the faint sound of the water of the river, now stirred by a rising breeze.

"Dead, and I have killed him!"

Sudden terror seized upon the convict. He looked around in dismay, fearing to see some one advancing to seize him, but he had the scene all to himself.

"Just heaven! what next? I have added

to my sins, and this time there is more than baseless accusation. Crosby is dead, and I am a murderer!"

The thought would not have brought much concern to the minds of the average of Graydon's late associates in the prison, but it was different with him. He had been an innocent man when he was last in those walls, but he was so no longer. Goaded to the quick he had lost his self-control—and this was the result:

"A murderer!"

It was a terrible thought, but it was not so much of himself he gave heed. His mind went further.

"My wife and child! Oh! what will they say? How can I go to them? When they see me, red-handed, they will turn away from me in scorn—No; they will not do that. It will be worse; the news will break their hearts, for they love me. When they know the truth—"

Again he paused. Recollection of what must accompany a home-coming after what had happened fell with crushing force, and with it came another conviction—he could not go to them. Red-handed, his only course was to keep out of their sight. He could not face them as he now was.

"Yes," he thought, "I must be dead to them from this hour. They never would greet a murderer, and they cannot know how I was tempted. My wife is recovering from her injury, and as for their poverty, why, I will send them money. Yes, that's the way; the only way."

He did not remember then that he was still almost under the walls of Sing Sing, and that pursuit would soon be hot and fierce, but he planned for the future with thought of them—his loved ones—only.

Presently he chanced to look down and see the still form by his side, and this brought back all of his caution. Something must be done in the way of self-preservation, and it must be done at once.

"The body will hang me if it is found. What can I do with it?"

From the time of Cain the instinct to secrete one's victim has been strong with man-slayers, and it was so with Graydon. His plan was soon formed. He could not bury the body, and there was only one way.

Seizing his victim he dragged him to the water's edge, and then lifted the body into the boat. This done he hurriedly entered, himself grasped the oars and rowed away from shore.

He had no plan except to get clear, but when he had progressed a few fathoms he began to think more practically. The river was running turbulently, lashed by the wind, and it was all he could do to defy the power of the current.

He had set off to row straight across the river, but his course was diagonal, as he soon discovered.

"I don't like it," he muttered, "but I don't see any help for it. I must effect a landing where I best can. I must get rid of this thing"—he glanced at the burden in the boat—"and I dare not throw it over without its being weighted. It would be found and would ruin me."

He continued to pull lustily, and, despite the rough water, might have made the further shore without trouble had it not been for a new turn of events.

He had not been giving much heed to his surroundings, but a sound suddenly broke on his ears which caused him to look up the river. A steamer was bearing down on him, and so near now that he at once saw danger in its proximity.

"It will run me down!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER VI.

REMARKABLE EVENTS.

GRAYDON was not the most skillful of watermen, but he knew how to use oars with some dexterity, and he endeavored to avoid the mishap he had foreseen. He pulled lustily, and all might have been well but for the extreme roughness of the water. As it was he gained but little way, and the steamer came on rapidly, the river boiling under her keel.

The convict managed to get far enough out of her track so as to avoid a collision, but he found himself caught by the waves

thrown back from the larger craft, and while he still tugged at the oars his boat abruptly lifted itself in air.

"It's going over!" exclaimed Graydon.

It did go over. In another moment he was struggling in the water, and the steamer had passed on her way.

Instinctively the convict grasped at the overturned boat, and succeeded in getting position on its keel. It was a welcome respite, but as he was still churned to and fro he knew he could not long rely upon it. It took muscle to hang there.

Finding that he was not in immediate danger he looked the scene over, and was impressed with the fact that he seemed to be alone on the river. The boat had gone on, and there was no sign of Crosby's body.

The last fact gave him a queer feeling. The unceremonious disposal of his foe's remains were striking.

He did not long delay to think of it. Something else called for his attention.

"I can't stay here," he thought. "Every moment tells with me, and I must get ashore and continue my flight. Can I swim it?"

There was a good deal of doubt on the subject. He was not especially a good swimmer, and the water was rough.

"I have it!" he exclaimed presently. "I will throw off my clothes. That will enable me to progress all the better, and I may be able to make it. Off they go!"

It did not prove easy to disrobe and cling to the boat at the same time, but he managed to throw off his outer garments and all that would seriously impede his movements in the water. It took considerable time, and was interrupted by numerous lurches of the craft, but it was done, finally.

"Now for the swim," he added.

Just as he spoke he slipped from the boat and was compelled to swim, anyhow, so he struck out as best he could. The current proved to be very strong, however, and he soon found that it was one thing to swim in a peaceful sheet of water, and another to breast the rough river.

Progress was slow, and the exhaustion of strength steady. He began to feel deeply worried.

"Can I make it?" he wondered.

His gaze was fixed on the western bank, and he saw nothing else. Suddenly he bumped up against something hard.

"Here he is!" cried a voice.

He was seized and pulled out of the water. He struck on something substantial, and as he cleared the water a little from his eyes he saw he was in a boat with several men about him.

"Brace up, Montgomery!" exclaimed a hearty voice. "You are all right, and we will soon have you on the steamer. We thought you were a goner, but we lowered the row-boat as soon as we could, and here we are. Give him a drink of whisky, men. How did you happen to fall overboard, Montgomery?"

The escaped convict was weak of body, but his mind was clear. He quickly realized that he had been mistaken for somebody else, and he was wise enough to make the best of it. Later, he could escape, but there was no haste about it.

It was not likely the people on the steamer had heard that a convict was missing from Sing Sing, and before they could learn of it, he would slip away—so he reasoned.

He did not try to talk, and the rescuers first plied him with the drink and then rowed quickly toward the steamer. They commented on the fact that he wore only under-clothing, but this did not surprise them. They thought that it showed good sense for him to disrobe in part when in such danger.

The steamer was reached, and he was hoisted to the deck. This done they carried him below.

It was then that, for the first time, Graydon had a startling thought.

"As soon as they get to the light they will see I am not the man they take me to be. Then they will not only investigate me, but they will blame me for taking them away from the genuine Montgomery, and leaving him to drown. He surely is drowned unless he was a very good swimmer. I am ruined, after all. Now for exposure!"

They carried him into the cabin and laid

him on a sofa. The craft was small, and the cabin had no tenant except themselves; there was nobody to comment on their unceremonious entrance.

"Now for the discovery," thought the convict, again.

He expected exclamations showing that his expectations were realized, but they did not come.

"How are you now, old man?" he was asked.

"All right," replied Graydon, mechanically.

"How much water have you on your stomach and lungs?"

"None."

"Not drowned a bit, eh?"

"No."

"Well, you play in luck, with the water so rough. When you fell overboard we considered you a dead man, sure. We stopped the steamer as soon as we could, and then made back for you, but not one of us had hope of finding you alive."

"I am alive."

Graydon spoke indifferently. He was surprised that he was not already recognized, but attributed it to their agitation—though, to be sure, he could see no evidence of agitation. Recognition must soon come, however—so he thought.

"Here, Bildad! Where are you?" shouted one of the rescuers.

A colored man came hurriedly out of a state-room, looking sleepy and confused.

"Get your eyes open," pursued the last speaker. "Your master has had a ducking, and you want to get his wet underclothing from him and give him a rubbing down, so he will not take cold."

The colored man seemed amazed.

"Why, Massa Call, how did you get in such condition?" he inquired.

"No questions, you black rascal!" ordered the spokesman. "Get him in shape as soon as you can. Mr. Call is a bit broken up by his adventure, but he will get his wits presently, and if you have not done your duty you will not long remain his valet."

"Yes, sah; yes, sah; I'll do it all right. Dis-a-way to the cabin, Massa Call."

"I'll give you an arm, Montgomery."

The spokesman lifted the convict, and then the latter was led by that person and the negro to a state-room. He submitted to all without a word. Discovery was averted for the time being, but it must soon come, of course. While it was averted he would make the best of his peculiar situation. Thus reasoned the escaped convict.

He was fairly strong again, and he resisted the suggestion that he at once lie down. He sat up, instead, while Bildad took off his wet underwear and rubbed him well with a coarse towel.

Before the spokesman went from the room he had given Bildad a clue to the accident—as he understood it—so the colored man had few questions to ask, but he stopped not in his flow of language.

"This yer' is the worst casualty I's heard of," he asserted. "You are lucky to be alive, sah. Never thought you'd get into such a fix, for you ain't had no adventure since you hired me, two years ago."

Graydon began to feel more interested. Amazing as the situation seemed, it was certain that everybody mistook him for the man who had fallen overboard. There was but one way of accounting for this fact, and that was that he resembled the genuine Montgomery.

It was almost past belief that he should look enough like him to deceive even the valet, but so it appeared to be.

Bildad was an accomplished workman in his line, and so applied the towel that he soon had Graydon's body in a glow, while the stimulants that had preceded the toweling aided to make the escaped convict feel in fine trim.

He was presently dressed in garments belonging to his companion's master, and they not only fitted well but were of fine material and carefully made. Evidently, the genuine man was wealthy.

During this process of robing Graydon he happened to notice an envelope on the stand, and he read the writing upon it. It was addressed to Montgomery Call, and the street and number which followed indicated an excellent part of the city of New York.

The convict hardly knew whether to bless or reproach the chance which had taken him where he was, but, as he was there, he prepared to make the best of it. He began to question Bildad.

"How far along are we?"

"Well, sah, we'll make New York by midnight, in spite of the delay to pick you up, sah."

"So we go to New York?"

"Why, where else should we go, sah?"

Graydon became cautious. "I am not wholly over my adventure, and my head is not just right. When we get there—how would you advise me to proceed?"

"Your carriage will be at the pier, sah, and I'd advise you to wrap yourself up careful, sah, and go right home. I don't think none of the guests will stay on the steamer over night, sah; you will remember the invitation was just for the day's outing—"

"Certainly."

"And when we get to the house, Mr. Call, I would suggest that you have a doctor in. Pardon me for suggesting of it, sah, but you know you are an unmarried man, and you ain't got no lady friend to say this to you. The housekeeper and the chambermaid are the only feminines we boast of, you know, and they ain't got no brains—begging your pardon, Mr. Call."

"You may be right."

"I think so. What more can I do, sah?"

"Nothing for the present. Leave me alone now."

"Won't you join the other gentlemen?"

"Presently. Let me be for awhile."

"Very well, sah."

Bildad went out of the room, and Graydon was alone. He stood erect, anxiously considering his situation. He had been mistaken for a certain Montgomery Call. How long could he keep up the deceit?

"Not long, surely," he decided. "Possibly I had better bolt now."

He looked out of the window, but sight of the swift-running river was enough to satisfy him on that point. Decidedly, his best way was to stick to the boat until the city was reached.

"The real Call is probably drowned, and if he is not, he cannot appear to dispute my identity while we are afloat. I will go on to New York. After that—What then, I wonder?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONVICT'S NEW ROLE.

GRAYDON was a man of nerve, and the more he reflected the more he was inclined to make the most of the chance offered him. Bildad had referred to the real Montgomery Call as a bachelor, and, if this was the case, it would help him a good deal, as he could the better stave off undue curiosity and misplaced sympathy.

"If the genuine article is drowned, as is undoubtedly the case, he can't appear to root me out. I can get into his quarters and play the hermit, perhaps. But this will delay me in seeing my wife and child—"

He stopped short.

"Just heaven! how can I go to them now?" he feverishly added. "I have slain Walker Crosby, and blood is on my hands. I can't go to my loved ones at all!"

His face became beaded with perspiration as this fact dawned upon him, and he took a quick turn about the room.

"I must have time to think of this," was his decision. "I must have time and a refuge, and I will play this Montgomery Call game to its full."

He delayed in the cabin as long as possible, and then went out to his fellow-voyagers. They crowded around him and gave many congratulations, all of which he received with composure. For the time being he was fully master of himself, and his calmness was remarkable.

He passed the remainder of the trip with his new acquaintances, smoking and talking. Now and then his mind went back up the river. He thought of an escaped convict and a hot search, long since begun; and he thought of the supposed end of Walker Crosby. Truly, his life had grown out of the realm of the ordinary.

"What would these people think," he wondered, "if they knew they had a man-killer along with them?"

They did not know it, and all went well on the voyage. In due time the city was reached. The standing of the party was indicated from the fact that nearly all had carriages awaiting them. Graydon was one of the latter class, and he entered calmly. Bildad mounted to the box beside the driver, and the start was made.

Full of courage as Graydon was, his mind changed more than once during that drive. Often he was tempted to seize the opportunity to slip from the carriage and make his escape, but he dreaded the hunt of officers, to which he would at once be subjected.

The longer he could keep out of sight the better it would be for him.

Anon the carriage drew up in front of a fine house, and Bildad solicitously aided his supposed master to alight. Then they entered. The negro insisted on giving his arm to his companion, so Graydon was conducted to Montgomery Call's sleeping room without any mistake on his part.

Once there, he was assisted to retire, by Bildad. After this he dismissed the man and was alone.

"What a change!" he thought. "Here I am in a house of luxury, and only just out of Sing Sing. Well, let me sleep as well as I can, for the morning will bring some one to expose me. Arrest will follow, of course, and then—"

He shivered, and did not complete the sentence. He did not forget, however, what the State did with murderers—when they caught them. That he would long evade pursuit he did not believe.

Realizing the value of full physical strength, he tried to get all the sleep he could. It was long before he lost consciousness, however, and when he did so his sleep was nervous and broken. Dreams of the most disagreeable and alarming sort visited him throughout the night.

In the morning there was a knock at the door. He thought it was officers after him, but it proved to be only Bildad with a cup of coffee and morning papers.

Bildad was very solicitous, but was finally convinced that his master was not ill.

The papers were a bait of rare interest to Graydon, and when he had drank the coffee he told the negro to leave him alone.

"Will you rise at the usual hour, sah?" inquired Bildad.

"Yes."

"Very well, sah; I will be in at ten o'clock."

Bildad retired, and Graydon turned feverishly to the papers. He found what he wanted, but the article was much shorter than he had expected. The escape of Oliver C. Graydon, a convict, was announced in a dispatch from Sing Sing, and the means of his escape explained. Further than that there was nothing except the statement that there was no clue to his whereabouts.

"They will soon have me," muttered the convict.

He continued in bed, noting the elegance of all the appointments of the room, until ten o'clock. Then Bildad came again and assisted him to dress. Afterward Graydon went to breakfast—a lonesome meal; but he enjoyed the good things of Montgomery Call's larder. All this was in the broad light of day, yet neither Bildad nor the table-girl discovered that he was other than the real master of the house.

Directly afterward one of the pleasure party of the previous night called to inquire concerning his condition.

"This will burst the bubble," thought the convict.

He met the caller, but to his surprise, there was no revelation. He was addressed as Mr. Call, and treated as such, and the visitor departed without having precipitated the explosion.

Graydon was dumfounded. It had grown to seem not so very odd that all these persons should be deceived in regard to his identity in the night, but he was amazed that day had not brought the discovery.

"The resemblance must be astonishing," he meditated. "I have heard of such things, but I never gave it much credence before. Am I really destined to pose longer as this rich man?"

It seemed like it, for the day wore on without any trouble. The impostor did not go out of the house, a course which was ren-

dered a matter of fact by his accident, and the continuance of his success led him to branch out somewhat.

Bildad was always at his service, and he managed to get the colored man to talk of his affairs without asking any question which would excite wonder.

According to Bildad, Mr. Montgomery Call was a rich bachelor; a man fond of books and not given to dissipation in any way. Barring an occasional trip to the theater, or a sail, the real Call went nowhere except for a walk or a carriage drive. He also made few visits and received fewer. His servants made up his household, and, as far as the inquirer learned, he had no relatives. He disliked notoriety and had a horror of jury duty, and for the latter reason never allowed his name to get into the City Directory.

Of all men he seemed to be the one whose part in life could be the easiest assumed, but Graydon did not look forward to a long acquaintance with the *role*.

Each moment he expected to see an officer appear, or, possibly, to see the real Montgomery Call, not drowned but alive, put in an appearance.

Despite his fears no mishap occurred during the day, and, greatly to his surprise, the evening papers told nothing to startle him. According to their account, Graydon, the convict, had been seen in Litchfield county, Connecticut, and officers were pursuing him sharply.

"No mention of Walker Crosby," mused the impostor. "The body has not yet been found. Unless the real Mr. Call shows up I may be safe here for several days more."

There was rest and peace in having an asylum, and he would have been almost happy, so great was the change from Sing Sing, had it not been for thoughts of his wife and daughter.

He loved them with all of his manly strength, and it was a great hardship that he could not see them. He knew, however, that an attempt to cross the country and join them would bring arrest, and he was still of the opinion that he could not go to them, even if there had not been that danger.

"My hands are red with Walker Crosby's blood," he meditated, "and even if they knew how that wretch tempted me, they would not be willing to meet me. I killed Crosby for their dear sakes, but they would shrink in horror from my red hands. They must not see me; I am the same as dead to them."

Despite his decision, he thought of them more than of himself. The latest news from home had been that his wife would probably recover her eyesight, so he had not that to worry about. One thing did haunt him, however: they were poor and friendless.

Who would help them, if he did not?

He began to form a plan. Montgomery Call had money in abundance. Graydon had reached the point where he would not hesitate to get hold of money for his loved ones, be the means what it might. Could he do so now? Could he get any of Call's wealth?

He interviewed Bildad once more, questioned him without the negro suspecting he was being questioned, so shrewdly was it done. Graydon dreaded to hear that Call kept his money in a bank, where a check would be necessary to get it out, but he was relieved when he found out that the income came in from real estate, and that an agent did all the business.

Again alone, the convict gave vent to his exultation.

"There is hope that I can get hold of the needed funds, and I will try it without delay. A little will help my dear ones amazingly, while if I can get more—ah! I will send them all I can raise, anonymously, and try to guard against calamity to them. Perhaps I can do it before the blow falls on me here."

CHAPTER VIII.

FAMILY CLAIMANTS.

A WEEK passed. It had not been one of startling events to Oliver Graydon. He still lived in Montgomery Call's house, and was treated as the real Call by the servants in the house. They were about all the persons he saw, for he had not been out in the day time, and after a few friendly inquiries from the

men who had been out in the steamer, the night of the change of Graydon's identity, nobody came near him to trespass on his time and false *role*.

This luck seemed positively amazing, but he had grown accustomed to it in a measure.

Although he looked for discovery at any moment, he was not so certain it was to come. In brief, he was getting acquainted with his new self, and acquiring some confidence.

He had been a close reader of the daily papers, but his search for sensation had not been rewarded.

The escaped convict was still missing from Sing Sing; the real Montgomery Call had not appeared, and no body had been found along the Hudson which might be that of Call, or of Walker Crosby.

Graydon had secured five hundred dollars in cash, and sent it to his wife, so he knew her pressing needs had been attended to.

On the evening of the seventh day he sat in Montgomery Call's private room, smoked one of Mr. Call's choice cigars and meditated.

"A week has gone, and I am still unchallenged here. Blessed fact! If I can only keep it up, all will be well. As Call I can live peaceful and happy, or I could if it were not for my wife and child. Poor loved ones! They must be kept ever ignorant of my fate, for I am a murderer. I can never see them more. Well, they would not want to see a man with blood-stained hands, and it is best so. The Sing Sing experts are ransacking all the country, and I am here."

There was satisfaction in this, for he had no love for the prison officials, and he paused to consider it. Then he resumed:

"I wish I knew more about Montgomery Call. What is his history? The little I have been able to glean from Bildad shows him merely as a recluse. It is said he has no relatives. I wonder if he has no history? I assume that the most quiet of men has a history, even if the world does not know of it, and it may be that Montgomery's past will yet pop up to worry me."

The thought was not a harrowing one, for he did not expect to be called upon to confront anything serious. He yawned, called Bildad, and then went calmly to bed.

The next morning he ate a peaceful breakfast and smoked a good cigar. This blissful occupation had just been concluded when Bildad came to him.

"There are two ladies in the parlor to see you, sir," stated the colored man.

Graydon looked up quickly.

"Ladies? To see me?"

"Yes, sah."

"What do they want?"

"They did not give their business, sah."

Graydon regarded Bildad anxiously. All along he had congratulated himself that, as he believed, he would not be called upon to see any of the female sex—Montgomery Call was supposed not to be a man of such acquaintances—and Graydon had felt that he was thereby free from the worst danger. He dreaded the eyes of women, believing them sharper than those of men.

"Quite likely," pursued Bildad, after a pause which was painful to his master, "they may be after alms. They are not well dressed, especially, and I never saw them before."

Graydon took courage. Probably there was no danger after all. He decided to go down and see them, and he went.

He opened the parlor door and walked into the room. He saw two ladies, one of whom was young, while the other could not be so called, bearing, as she did, the matronliness of middle age. He stood before them and looked critically.

He noticed that there was no friendly light in their eyes, as if they saw a friend, and no bewilderment, as if they saw a stranger where they had expected a friend. All this was encouraging.

"I am Mr. Call," he announced, with serenity which surprised him. "In what way can I be of service to you?"

He was being well scrutinized in return, and was impressed with the belief that the regard was not wholly amicable.

"Are you anxious to serve us?" grimly asked the elder lady.

"If I can."

"Well, you can."

"Pray tell me how."
"Don't you know?"
"I do not."

"Do you mean to say you don't know me?"

Fear came upon the impostor. Perhaps, after all, the genuine Montgomery Call would have recognized them. It was too late to retreat, and he was about to frame a suitable reply when he was forestalled.

An ominous look appeared in the eyes of the elder lady, and she distinctly added:

"I am your wife!"

"The dickens you are!"

The exclamation escaped Graydon's lips impulsively. He was too much surprised to be filled with consternation. He had been given to understand that Call was a bachelor, and this was wholly new to him. Had he assumed a family as well as a home?

"You take it coolly," she added, sharply.
"Because I do not comprehend."

"Carry your mind back to England, and remember Susanna Trull."

Graydon shook his head. He must take some course, and he saw none more promising than general denial.

"I do not remember the name."

"And don't you remember me?"

"No."

"Oh, the wretch!" cried the elder lady..

"Oh, the wretch!" echoed the younger lady.

"You deny me because time has faded my charms," pursued Susanna; "but here is one who is not old. Look at your sweet daughter, our own Hope."

She pointed to the girl, but Graydon did not feel impressed by her youth. If these were the wife and child of the real Montgomery Call, they surely were not his.

"I don't know her," he stubbornly returned.

"Why should you, when you have not seen her since she was an infant? Ah! it is almost twenty years since you deserted us so cruelly, and time has changed us all. Now that you know us, tell me if you are going to recognize your wife and child?"

Once more Graydon took courage. He took it for granted that the women were what they claimed, and that Call had deserted them in England because he tired of them. They spoke with an English accent, too—probably they had always lived there, and knew no one in the United States. His course appeared plain.

"Madam, you are laboring under a mistake," he asserted.

"That's it! I expected you would deny us. I am not surprised, when I have seen so much of your perfidy in the past. I say you came to England a rich man, made my acquaintance under a false name, married me, and then deserted me when our child was an infant. I expected denial now."

"You have the wrong man, madam."

"Do you mean to say you are not Simeon Trull?"

"I do."

"Wretch, wretch!" cried Susanna, hotly.

"I am Montgomery Call—"

"So I am aware, and a pretty chase I have had to find you, even when I arrived in New York. You kept your name out of the City Directory, and that shows you were hiding from justice."

"It was done merely to evade jury duty, madam."

"I don't know what you mean by that, but I do know you are a Judas all through. You never meant me well when you knew me in England. You went under a false name and married me as Simeon Trull, and now you skulk in New York behind closed doors, all to defraud your lawful wife and daughter."

"Nonsense!"

Mrs. Trull had a will of her own, and her eyes flashed with anger.

"Do you deny it?"

"Yes."

"Am I your wife?"

"No."

"Villain!"

"You admit that you have not seen me for a long time—"

"Almost twenty years."

"You are not capable of recognizing a man after all that while."

"I recognize you as easily as if it had been but twenty days. You have not

changed a particle. Besides, I found absolute proof in England that your name of Simeon Trull was fictitious, and that your real name was Montgomery Call."

"It is not so; I never sailed as Simeon Trull."

"Maybe you will not deny that you are Montgomery Call?" sarcastically suggested Susanna.

Graydon waved his hand, as if to dispose of the question, and made no reply. He was inclined to believe that the lady's story was true in all its main features, and that she was Call's wife, but he felt that, as Call's substitute, he had a duty to perform. It would not do to admit her claim.

There was silence for some seconds, and Mrs. Trull clearly awaited further speech from her companion, but it did not come, and it was she who broke the pause with the abrupt inquiry:

"Well?"

"What?" asked Graydon.

"Are you going to receive me as your wife?"

"No."

"What will you do?"

"I will do nothing for you. Nothing could be more absurd than the claim you have made. I am a single man; I never heard of Simeon Trull, or of you, before. I decline to have anything to do with you."

Susanna waxed indignant again.

"You deny your own daughter, do you?"

"I deny that yonder girl is my daughter."

"Nevertheless, you will receive her in your home."

"You mistake; I will do nothing of the sort."

"Suppose we insist on staying?"

"Then I will have the servants eject you."

"Just what I wish you to do!" exclaimed Mrs. Trull, with emphasis. "Put us out, if you dare! Then I will go straight to the police, and I'll fill this house with enough of them to enforce my claims."

Up to this time the counterfeit Montgomery Call had been very calm under fire, but his looks suddenly became such that Mrs. Trull laughed sarcastically.

"Aha! that touches you!" she cried. "I reckon you don't want the police called in. May I ask why?"

CHAPTER IX.

GRAYDON MEETS A DETECTIVE.

THERE was much of exultation in Mrs. Trull's manner. When she requested permission to ask why Graydon did not want to have the police called in she was simply sarcastic, but she had seen that he had grown alarmed, and she gloried over it.

He was alarmed. He had looked with much apathy on her claim to be the legal Mrs. Trull, but it was quite another matter when she threatened to summon the police.

To face them undoubtedly meant ruin to him—he would, he believed, be recognized as the escaped Sing Sing convict.

He stood worried and confused, while Mrs. Trull laughed unmusically. His early indifference had not prepared her for such a change when her final threat came.

"Don't you want to admit that I am your wife?" she demanded, with tantalizing smile.

"Madam," replied Graydon, "I assure you that you are mistaken—"

"Then you will not fear the police. I will call them—"

She started toward the door, but Graydon spoke quickly:

"Stop!"

"Well?"

"We don't want any outside interference here—"

"I thought not. You cringe when the rub comes."

It was the undisguised triumph of a small nature, but Graydon was too much interested in the secret to heed her exultation.

"Let us compromise—"

"No!" broke in Susanna. "There is but one way to do. Acknowledge me as your wife."

Graydon moved uneasily. He was not

willing to do anything of the sort, either in his assumed or true character, but he knew he must avoid public exposure of Montgomery Call's case.

"I will give you the use of a house—"

"This one?"

"No, but a good one—"

"I am here; I stay! I am your wife; this is the place for me. If you refuse to let me stay here I will go to the police."

She liked to use the word. Without knowing the true reason, she perceived that it was an instrument of terror to her companion, and she was relentless in applying the screws.

"Madam," continued Graydon, "I have been ill, and I am not able to attend to this, but you can come into the house as my guest, and as soon as I am well I will acknowledge you as Mrs. Call—"

"You must do it now!" was the inexorable reply.

A trifle of defiance rose within Graydon.

"I absolutely will not blazon this matter to the world just now, and thereby bring public notice to myself. I may be able to do so later—now, I will not. I will not take you out and introduce you to Tom, Dick and Harry."

"Will you admit to the servants that I am your wife?"

Graydon hesitated.

"By deferring the acknowledgment you show desire to act some part of trickery," added Susanna.

"No."

"Then what is your object?"

"I am known as a bachelor," answered Graydon, desperately striving to find a reason, "and it would hurt me in business to have this come too suddenly. All business men have certain things under way which require careful handling. I could reduce myself to beggary in short order by rashness. Give me a month in which to adjust my affairs, and I will then do as you say. Until then you shall remain here as my guest—"

"Will you admit to the servants that I am your wife?"

This was just what Graydon did not wish to do, and he argued the point long and earnestly, but Mrs. Trull was firm. She was willing to defer public announcement, but to the servants the supposed facts must be told at once. She was "going to get square," she asserted.

It was not until she spoke of the police again that Graydon gave in, but it was done, at last.

"So be it," he consented. "I will give you and your daughter—"

"Our daughter, Mr. Call."

"As you will. I will give you and her the best room in the house for your joint occupancy, and there you can abide until the new order is fully promulgated."

"Summon the servants!"

Again Graydon hesitated for a moment, but he wound up by touching the bell. Bildad came, and Mrs. Trull was introduced as the wife, and Hope as the daughter of the master of the house.

Bildad was a polite man, but politeness failed him then. He could only stare in blank amazement. Knowing Montgomery Call as he had believed he did, he would as soon have expected to see a statue walk around the city as to hear that there was a Mrs. Call.

Graydon had grown cool once more. He believed that, whether Mrs. Trull's claim was good or bad, she would be content to enter the house as she was doing, and if she demanded public recognition it would be at some period decidedly later. In any case he had a reprieve, and he was self-possessed in the midst of the wonder of the servants.

A chambermaid showed the new adjuncts to the family to their room, and the first crisis was over. While the servants gossiped in their quarters Graydon meditated alone.

"This is a complication I do not like, but it had to be faced. If the woman tells the truth, Montgomery Call was a deceitful knave. How could he claim to be a bachelor when he had such a charming wife?"

A momentary gleam of humor pervaded the atmosphere, but it was soon gone.

"Will this woman make trouble for me? She ought to be content, but a person with a mania rarely is. I fear that Mrs. Trull will

prove no exception to the rule. She stands with me on my volcano, and she is liable to wake it into life."

He went to the window and looked out.

Since coming to the house he had been practically a prisoner. He dared not be otherwise. If his resemblance to Call had done so much for him, it would not save him if those who knew Oliver Graydon saw him on the street.

"How long can this continue?" he wondered, despairingly. "I only postpone my misery. I am sure to be recaptured. Then—"

He turned from the window with a nervous start. Discovery did not mean a mere return to Sing Sing—it had an import far more ominous, for he had not forgotten how Walker Crosby went out of sight.

In due time Mrs. Trull and Hope came down and joined him. Evidently they did not wish to be hostile, for Susanna was very gracious of manner. She insisted on trying to talk of their alleged days of courtship in England, but this was a subject on which Graydon was so little informed that he preferred other topics.

All went smoothly until evening. Then, as they sat in the parlor a visitor came to see Mrs. Trull. Graydon was of the opinion that this was rushing matters, but Susanna was frank.

She introduced him, and then added:

"Mr. Randall has been helping us to locate you. In fact, but for him we should not have found you at all, perhaps."

Graydon looked at Joseph Randall without much cordiality in his expression. Joseph was young and good looking, and had a good face and alert manner. More than this, there was something passing mere acquaintance in the way he regarded Hope, and Graydon was led to think:

"I may yet have a son-in-law on my hands. This is getting family connections with a vengeance."

As none of his associates showed a disposition to be hostile, the impostor was not inclined to force matters, and when the ladies asked to be excused for awhile, Graydon graciously brought out some of the real Montgomery Call's cigars, and he and Randall began to smoke in concert.

Conversation was trivial for awhile, but Randall finally remarked:

"You are fortunate to be reunited with your wife and daughter."

"I appreciate the reunion at its full worth," dryly answered Graydon.

"Mrs. Call is a fine woman."

"My taste is good in such matters."

"And Miss Hope is a very sweet girl."

"Beyond doubt."

"You will be very happy together."

"Mr. Randall, may I ask how long you have known them?"

"A trifle over a week."

"Oh! How did you happen to know them?"

"I supposed you had been told that. It was professionally."

"Professionally?"

"I am a detective."

Graydon's blood seemed to chill in his veins. The quiet composure of the speaker, coupled with his general manner, was proof that he told the truth, and it was a startling revelation to the escaped convict.

"Not being able to find you, themselves, they came to me," explained Randall. "A friend of mine, one Rodney Proctor, happened to do them a favor, was told of their dilemma, and came to me to aid. I have done so, as you see. The ladies asked me to accompany them when they came here, but I was sure your seeming neglect was not intentional, so I suggested that they call alone, and then I would come and see how things were going. That explains why I am here."

The detective was pleasant and frank, evidently wishing to impress his host favorably, but Graydon would as soon have seen a rattlesnake in the act of striking him.

A detective in his house! Surely, matters were getting on desperate footing.

Joseph Randall did want to impress his companion favorably, and, thinking that the latter was angry, because he had come into the case professionally, he tried to wear away the objection by being more agreeable than ever. He talked on, but with an air of modesty which was much in his favor.

He had most of the talking to do, for

Graydon was alarmed in earnest, and this was why a subject of conversation was soon broached that added new fuel to the flame.

"Every detective in the city is on the alert now," pursued Randall. "Of course you have read of the escape of a convict from Sing Sing?"

The listener was like ice. Were his worst fears to be realized? Were these people only playing with him?

"A certain Oliver Graydon," went on the speaker, "has escaped, as I have said, and he is being pursued far and wide. That means that the officers and detectives of New York are on the alert."

"Yes," assented the older man in a hushed voice.

"He may be in this city," added Randall.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"Are you hunting him down?"

"I am looking for him. It may fall to me to find him."

The observation was careless, and it should have shown Graydon nothing was back of it, but it did not. He simply knew he was face to face with one of the men so dangerous to him, and it fell heavily on him. He could not find words in which to reply.

"I feel a special interest in the case," Randall wandered on, "and if I can bring Oliver Graydon to justice I will do it."

"What harm has he ever done you?" demanded the host, sharply.

"None; but he is an escaped criminal."

"So he must be hunted like a mad dog!" bitterly exclaimed Graydon.

"Pardon me, Mr. Call, but such is not the spirit in which I do my work. He must be guilty, or he would not have been in Sing Sing—"

"Profound logic!" sneered Graydon.

"Well, let us say he is supposed to be guilty. Until I know otherwise, he is lawful prey."

It was just as well, perhaps, that Mrs. Trull and Hope returned at this point. Oliver Graydon appeared no more as a subject of conversation, and, after an animated conversation between the three members of the party who were interested in each other, Mr. Randall took his leave.

He was cordially invited to call again, and he said he would do so.

"A fine man," remarked Mrs. Trull, when the detective was out of sight.

"A noble man," declared Hope, with fervor.

Graydon scowled upon the women, but, as they did not heed him, he soon retired for the night to his private room.

"Well, this is a fine state of affairs," he meditated. "Here I have owned a wife, and now I am to hobnob with a detective. I am close to the rocks. Can I keep off from them? Randall will come again, and he will be a constant menace. I am desperately beset!"

CHAPTER X.

CITY WAIFS, AND THEIR PERIL.

It was night, and Broadway had changed from a busy thoroughfare to a far-reaching street of staid composure. The restless seeming cable cars rattled past, and now and then a lone pedestrian went his way. That was about all that broke the silence.

From a cross-street two ladies came with slow and uncertain steps. With one of them the uncertainty was painfully noticeable, for she leaned upon the arm of her companion and picked her way cautiously.

Persons accustomed to city life, where all sorts of misfortune are daily visible, would have no difficulty in understanding her case. "Blind!" would have been the verdict.

She was of middle age, and her naturally thin face was worn and furrowed by illness or trouble. Her companion was young, pretty and strong, without being above the average height of her sex.

Men paused to look at them—the one so feeble and unfortunate, and the other so sweetly fair. They seemed unlike the people usually noticed in the city, and many a man who had a horror of mendicants felt that this was a case out of the ordinary run, and was half-tempted to pause and offer his aid, if it was needed. And those who looked observed that both of the ladies appeared sad and doubtful as to their own movements.

Nobody did speak to them, however.

They set out to cross Broadway. It was at once apparent that they were not accustomed to the work, for the one looked with fear at the grinding cable car, and the other turned her sightless eyes from side to side in pitiful apprehension.

The crossing was tried, however.

Close to the track they hesitated, and then rashly pushed on. A warning cry from the brakeman of the car changed their resolution, and they did the worst possible thing. They turned back, not seeing that a second car was coming from the opposite direction.

A moment more and they were almost under the wheels. The younger woman suddenly bestirred herself and pushed her companion out of harm's way. The blind woman was saved, but it almost cost the younger one her life. One moment she appeared to hover under the wheels, and then a muscular arm lifted her away to safety.

She stumbled and fell, only to be picked up promptly.

Both cars rumbled on their way, a few strong comments from the employees following drifting back.

The younger woman looked around in terror. She saw the blind companion of her wanderings standing in safety, and her frightened look faded, but not so with the helpless traveler.

"Rachel, Rachel!" she cried.

"Here, mother, here!" was the quick reply.

"You are hurt; you are killed—"

"No, no; I am safe!"

"But the car—"

"Did not touch me."

"You fell; I heard you."

"Only after the danger was over. Be calm, mother; be calm. I assure you I am not harmed. I was saved in time, thanks to—"

She turned to her rescuers, upon whom she had not before bestowed any attention. She saw a young man, and with him, a half-grown boy. They were politely attentive, and she hastened to thank them with a depth of feeling which made their reward all they were inclined to ask.

"You are quite welcome," replied the young man. "I did not do much; I only seized you and dragged you out of the way of the car."

"But he did it just prime," broke in the boy. "Mighty muscular arm he has got, you bet! But, he's a member of a boatin' club an' athletic association, an' that rounds out the arm. Rodney Proctor, here, is a sample of it."

"Don't be foolish, Skimmer," warned Rodney, smiling.

Rachel, as the young lady had been called, repeated her thanks, and then added:

"Mother is almost blind, so she cannot care for herself as she otherwise could."

"You have my sympathy, miss," answered Rodney.

"And mine," answered the blind woman, quickly. "is all aroused for your great goodness. You have saved my daughter—and she is my all."

"No, no, mother!" exclaimed Rachel.

"What more is there for me? We are even homeless."

"Homeless?" questioned Rodney.

"You see, sir," explained Rachel, "we came to New York as entire strangers. We had the name and address of a hotel to which we had been directed by a friend, but we lost the paper which was our guide. Hoping it was near here, we are searching, thinking sight of the name might awaken recollection as to what the name was, and it was then we so nearly met our death."

Rodney Proctor, born and bred in New York, was accustomed to about every species of scene which a city could furnish, but he felt himself moved now to a depth of feeling new to him.

Rachel was a pretty girl; a fact to which no man of Rodney's age could be indifferent; but there was far more to it. She was at once intelligent, refined and in trouble. Her face was sad and her voice trembled. She kept one arm constantly around her mother, and the blind woman clung to her as if to the one hope left.

The lights of Broadway shone on this picture with all their brazen assurance, and it was something forcible in its nature.

Rodney was thoroughly aroused, but, before he could answer, there was a low warning from Skimmer.

"Eyes out, Rod!" he whispered. "Sports are on the trail."

Rodney looked up and saw two men approaching. Each was in his way a typical character in New York, and, though dissimilar in appearance, they were not unlike perhaps in nature.

One was young, dashing, expensively but flashily dressed, and a monument of cool assurance. The other was older and decidedly shabby, though not ragged. The one looked as if he lived by his wits and found the plan a paying investment, while the other apparently had not found his wits of the sort to bring in cash.

These men hastened up to the group.

"Excuse me," exclaimed the flashy man, "but can we be of aid here?"

Rodney regarded him coldly.

"I don't think you can," he shortly replied.

"But the ladies are in trouble."

"Yes," chimed in the second man, "and it's our delight ter help such. See?"

"Be still, Dickey!" commanded the flashy man.

"There is no trouble here," coldly remarked Rodney.

"But I think there is."

"Pardon me, but you are wholly wrong."

"Do you know these ladies, or are you a new acquaintance?"

"What is that to you?"

"Simply that I think I have just as good right here as you have, and I object to being snapped at like a dog."

"Go your way and you will have no trouble."

"What's that? Do you order me around?"

"The sum and substance of it is, your help is not needed."

"Maybe it is. I don't know that the ladies have found honest men. I don't know you—"

"I have the advantage of you, Henry Kneeland."

The flashy man looked crestfallen. For some reason he did not like the sound of his own name. He was in for the venture, however, and he stuck to his position.

"Ladies, I will show you to where you can find friends—"

"You will do nothing of the sort!" sharply answered Rodney. "We do not care to talk with you further, Mr. Kneeland. Your help has not been asked for, and it is not wanted. Oblige us by going your way."

Kneeland was observing, if nothing more. He wanted to impress the pretty girl of the party favorably, and when he saw her shrink away from him, and close to Rodney, his wrath broke loose toward the luckier man. He considered that he had been made the object of prejudice by Rodney, and he determined to resent it.

"Not until I give you a lesson in manners!" he cried. "You are insolent to me, and that I won't endure from any man. See? Take that!"

Quickly doubling up his fist, he shot it out toward the face of his opponent, but the blow did not fall as he expected. Deftly Rodney warded it off, and, almost in the same motion, Rodney knocked the flashy man off his feet with a neat counter-stroke.

"Cricky! that's a good one!" exclaimed the delighted Skimmer.

"Thunder an' lightnin'!" blankly muttered Dickey.

Kneeland floundered to his feet. His choice garments were soiled, and both his person and his pride were hurt. He sprung at Rodney like a madman.

"I'll smash ye!" he shouted.

He did nothing of the kind. A second neat blow again sent him to earth, and he fell heavily. He came up confused and wild with rage.

"He's the devil!" was his comment. "At him, Dickey Bond!"

The second man had thus far been content to be a looker-on, but he was fully of his companion's mind, now that his aid was needed. He was eager to give it, and he moved with Kneeland. Both leaped at the single man.

A low cry of terror escaped Rachel's lips. She had been frightened enough before, but now she was overwhelmed with fear. Such

scenes were wholly new to her, and she gasped:

"They will kill him!"

CHAPTER XI.

AN ENEMY APPEARS.

RODNEY PROCTOR was not alarmed by the furious onslaught. He was not unprepared for such work, for his athletic training had made him a good boxer, and, though well aware that other men were the same, he did not believe he was now to encounter experts.

For the third time he knocked Kneeland over, but Dickey Bond was too quick for him to give that person a like stroke. Dickey swung his arms around the young athlete, and then cried:

"This way, Henry! I'll hold him. Wade in and lambast the critter!"

Kneeland was willing, but, when he moved again to the attack a foot was dexterously thrust in front of his own, and he tripped ingloriously, while Skimmer's voice rung out shrilly:

"No, ye don't, Hannah! Keep off, or there will be a hurt duck about your circumference."

Skimmer had made his essay just in time, and Rodney now threw Dickey off so heavily that the fellow got a severe shock as he tumbled on the hard sidewalk.

"There's a cop!"

There was no policeman in sight, but Skimmer's head was a long one, and it was he who tried this device. It worked to a charm. Kneeland struggled up, seized his hat, and then fled with Dickey close at his heels.

Skimmer laughed merrily.

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth!" he mocked.

They were masters of the field, and Rodney turned to the ladies with all of the coolness imaginable.

"Don't be alarmed," he advised, soothingly. "This is only a slight extract from New York life. All is over now."

It was not so easy to quiet their shaken nerves, but he had a way which was most reassuring, and he finally got them enough composed so that business was again considered.

"I understand that you have lost the address of the hotel to which you were going. Had you friends there?"

"It was merely mentioned to us as a good place," replied Rachel. "We have no friends in New York."

"But you must go somewhere for the night?"

"Yes."

"If you will trust me I will advise you. Did you want a refuge briefly, or for a considerable time?"

"We—we do not yet know," hesitatingly began Rachel, but her mother interrupted her:

"We are here, sir, on a sacred errand. We come to seek one who is lost—a dear one—"

Rachel looked startled.

"Do not try to speak, mother," she urged. "Your strength will not allow of it."

"Oliver, Oliver!" murmured the blind woman, brokenly.

Rodney Proctor had a sympathetic heart, and he quickly exclaimed:

"Come with me and I will find you a safe refuge. To-night, I can suggest nothing sumptuous—"

"We want nothing of that kind," interrupted the blind woman. "Our means are but small. We have only the little sum of money we so mysteriously received—"

"Mother!" cried Rachel, in marked trepidation, "you will tire yourself all out. Please let me do the talking for both of us."

Rodney was not so slow as to fail to see that there was a secret to hide in all this. Rachel was alarmed lest the secret should leak out, and in the present mood of the elder woman there was, indeed, great danger of it. He could not, however, believe that these gentle women had anything in the way of guilt on their minds or records, and he ignored their agitation.

"The hour grows late," he kindly pursued.

"I will suggest that I now conduct you to a

safe refuge. In the morning you can act with more ease and strength, and, with your permission, I will call then and see that all is well with you."

He received grateful thanks, and then the party moved up Broadway. Rodney knew of a very good, but humble boarding-house, and to this he conducted them.

There was no difficulty in making arrangements, and before he left he had seen them well housed.

He was to call in the morning, though he was not impressed with the belief that he was especially desired as a caller.

He and Skimmer moved away down town.

"Wot do ye think of Mrs. an' Miss Forrest?" asked the boy, repeating the names they had given.

"I like them," briefly answered Rodney.

"They are jim-hickies!" emphatically declared the boy.

"I am glad you like them."

"Say, but they are in a pile o' trouble, ain't they?"

"It does seem so."

"Seem? Why, et's sure as guns. Yes, they are all broke up. They are country folks come to New York because some member o' the family has got inter dif. It's the old story. The mother was inclined ter let et out, but her daughter just set on that, quick. Wonder what the secret is."

"I have no idea."

"The old lady said they come here with money mysteriously sent by somebody. I'll bet a red cent against a blue one, that the errin' men.ber stole that cash."

"I don't believe they have an erring member in their family."

"White eats hev black kittens," tersely replied Skimmer.

"As we are to help them—if asked—we may yet learn all, but be sure and not get curious, Skimmer."

"I never poke my nose more than forty cubits inter nobody else's biz," declared the boy.

In the meanwhile Rachel and her mother were alone in her room. The daughter noticed that her companion was very much excited.

"We will retire at once," she suggested.

"I cannot sleep," was the reply.

"But you must, mother."

"How can I? We are now near where we think Oliver is. The thought—have you the money safe, Rachael?"

"Yes."

"He must have sent it; nobody else would. Probably, as we have before studied it out, Oliver borrowed it of somebody. It is odd, though, that he sent us no word with it."

"You know I suggested that he feared his letter might fall into unfriendly hands, if he wrote one."

"True, true. Poor, dear husband! how sorrows pursue him. May Providence grant that he be not recaptured and sent back to that awful prison."

"Hush! Do not speak the word here!" cautioned Rachel.

"I forgot. I will be more prudent. Anyhow, we are now here to search for him; to help him, if we can."

"Pray Providence we may be able."

It was the prayer of both their devoted hearts, but the prayer was in one sense too strong for their good—they slept but little that night.

The next morning they had a peaceful breakfast, but they were on the threshold of new difficulties. A caller was announced, and, without a thought of its being other than Rodney Proctor, they bade the servant admit him to their room.

He came, a tall, lank man, with a cadaverous, mean-looking face. Meeting Rachel's gaze he smiled unpleasantly—a sort of gloating, triumphant smile, it seemed—while she stood dumfounded, her color fading away perceptibly.

"Well," he sneered, "why don't you greet me?"

At the sound of the voice the blind woman sprung to her feet.

"Walker Crosby!" she exclaimed.

"No," promptly replied the visitor; "not Walker, but his brother Perkins."

"You—you—why are you here?" panted the blind woman.

"To see you, Mrs. Graydon."

"Great heaven! could we not be spared this?"

"Go lightly, if you please. Beggars can't be choosers, and the wife of a convict can't be too finical, even if he is now an escaped jail-bird."

It was a most unkind retort, but neither of the women resented it in words; they were too much overwhelmed. Utter dismay was in both faces.

"The long and short of it is," pursued Perkins Crosby, "I happened to see you last night being escorted here by a gallant young man. As soon as I set eyes on you it occurred to me there was meat in it. If you were in New York it must be because Oliver Graydon was here, too—and the police are anxiously looking for him."

"We do not know where he is," replied Rachel.

"Perhaps you don't know he escaped from Sing Sing?" sneered the caller.

"We do not know where he is now."

"It is an era of mysterious disappearances. Now, my brother, Walker Crosby, has also gone out of sight. He is an honest man, and no policeman need worry about him! Still, Walker has not kept his promise to call on me here in the city. Business keeps him, I suppose. Has Graydon any pressing business engagements that you know of?"

The sneer was ignored.

"Why have you come to taunt us in our misery?" asked Rachel, tremulously.

"Do you look at it that way? Well, I am not your foe. I only dropped in to ask where Graydon was. Now, I know he is in New York. Nothing else would have taken you here. You came to meet him; that's what. More, I reckon he is now in this house."

"He is not, and I do not know where he is."

"You may be telling the truth; I don't know. I would not know Graydon if I were to see him face to face. I never met him, you know. It would be different with my brother Walker; he has met him."

"Do not mention the name of that man!" exclaimed the blind woman.

"I dare say Walker has been a bit severe on you. Well, he hates Graydon, you know—some old grudge. Ladies, give me a twenty dollar note and I will not tell the police that Graydon is in New York."

"So you are here as a blackmailer?"

"The Crosbys are always open to the making of a dollar."

"We have none for you, and but few for ourselves."

"That may be so. Now I think of it, Walker gave me to understand that your financial affairs were not of the best. However, Graydon can afford to pay for freedom, and I want to know where he is."

"We do not know, as I have said."

Perkins Crosby caressed his lean face for several moments, and then coolly remarked:

"I'll keep you company until we find him."

CHAPTER XII.

AN ALARM.

PERKINS CROSBY enjoyed the impression he had made, and enjoyed it with all of the satisfaction of a mean and contemptible nature. He saw that he was as much an object of fear as a rattlesnake would have been, and it was great pleasure to see the two women writhe under the lash of his presence and the terror he inspired.

The blind woman was trembling and wholly unnerved. Rachel was but little calmer, but she had an element of firmness in her composition, even in trying situations.

She now spoke with more emphasis.

"You will not keep us company at all, Mr. Crosby. My father is not here; he has not been here, and we do not know where he is."

"Then why are you in New York?"

"Why are you here?"

"Not badly put, I will admit. Let me be frank. My brother Walker wrote me to join him here—he wrote a fortnight ago, but the time was to be now—and I came. Curiously enough, he has not put in an appearance."

"I do not believe you. You are here this minute as his spy."

"Wrong."

"Why else should you interest yourself in our affairs?"

"For his sake, I will admit; but I tell the truth when I say he has failed to meet me as planned. I do not know where he is. Very likely he is hunting for Oliver Graydon."

"So you are."

"Miss Rachel, let us have done with doubling and twisting. Hear the whole truth from me. I saw you, last night, and tracked you here. Seeing you, I thought to myself, 'Oliver Graydon is in New York, or they would not have come here.' If I had been shrewd I should, perhaps, have kept out of sight and tracked you slowly; but I was consumed with a desire to see and talk with you. All else I have said may be set down as cheap talk. I spoke of money on the impulse of the moment, but I did not really intend to ask you for any. That is all."

Crosby moved abruptly to the door and then turned and faced them. An ugly smile over his face.

"Oliver Graydon will soon be netted," he added.

"Do you know where he is?" cried Mrs. Graydon.

"I do not."

"Then how will he be caught?"

"Not by me, I dare say, for I do not know how he looks—I never saw him, you know—but you would not be here if he was not in the city. He will be caught!"

With this reiteration Perkins Crosby turned again and marched from the room. His steps were heard on the stairs, and then the front door closed heavily.

Mother and daughter were alone. The one looked at the other; the other turned her sightless eyes upon her child.

"Rachel," she spoke, faintly, "have we made an awful mistake?"

"How?"

"By coming here."

"What harm will it do?"

"We may have put the officers on the track."

Rachel sighed deeply.

"Providence forbid!"

"I am terribly afraid."

"Anyhow, our presence here is no clue to father's whereabouts. We do not ourselves know he is here. We received a sum of money from here, and concluded that he must be here, so we came to see if we could find and help him. He may not be here."

Where they had been eager to believe before there was now the hope that Oliver Graydon was not in New York, but above all was the prayer common to both which was expressed by Mrs. Graydon:

"Heaven forbid that we have injured his chances by coming on!"

At the best, their own chances of finding the missing man were curtailed. If they moved they were likely to have police eyes on them, for they could not believe that Perkins Crosby would fail to notify the police. He had enough of his brother's nature to be ready to persecute the unfortunate.

It was not long before Rodney Proctor came.

The ladies saw him with mixed emotions. They were grateful to him for his kindness, and his manner appealed to the admiration of both, but they would rather have been left alone. Whatever they might be able to do for Oliver Graydon, or whatever they might try to do, must be done secretly, and they could take no one into their confidence.

Rodney was considerate on this occasion, and he talked pleasantly and kindly on all subjects except the business which had brought them to New York.

He was not one to force himself upon others, so he waited for them to begin. He waited in vain. They said nothing, and when he rose to go the subject had not been touched upon.

Then he felt that he must say something, and did so. They had renewed their thanks, and he improved the opportunity.

"If I can assist you further, I shall be glad to do so," he remarked.

"We are very much obliged, answered Rachel, "but we do not know of anything now."

"You are strangers in the city?"

"Yes."

"It is not the easiest of places to find anything or anybody. I am not aware of the nature of your business, but if I can give you any help, you have only to call on me."

"You are more than kind, and we thank you more and more."

Rodney could not fail to understand the persistent evasion of the subject, and, though he felt considerably disappointed, he silently acquiesced, and let the matter drop.

He went away, but not without an invitation to call again.

Once more they were left alone, and left, too, with the question in their minds, How were they to begin? and what were they to do to find Oliver Graydon?

As they looked out on the brick walls of the houses and remembered that the city stretched for miles along the river, they began to realize the difficulty of their undertaking.

How were they to begin?

They were considering the point without advancing a step when the landlady appeared. She felt for them, for their faces were the picture of sadness, and, as a small favor, she had brought in a morning paper.

She left it with a few friendly words, but would have been disappointed if she had heard Rachel's comment when the door was closed:

"What do we care for the news of the day?"

"You forget," quickly replied Mrs. Graydon, "that there may be something about your father."

It was enough to cause Rachel to unfold the paper quickly. She ran her eye over the columns; then she exclaimed:

"Oh, mother!"

"What is it?" asked the blind woman, in agitation.

"Listen to this headline! 'Graydon is Here. The Escaped Convict Seen in New York!'"

"What? Read it!—read it!"

They had been thrown into a fever of excitement, and Rachel's eyes were misty with emotion as she tried to peruse the article. It was brief, and open to the suspicion of "scare" head-lines.

"Officer O'Brien, of the Park police, reported at a late hour, last night, that he had seen Graydon, the fugitive convict, in Central Park. He met the man near a lamp on one of the walks, but, before he could accost him, the convict had made good his escape into the shrubbery, and all search for him was useless. Officer O'Brien was on the force that originally arrested Graydon, and feels positive that he has seen the wanted man. The report is doubted by some of his associates, but it is worthy of careful investigation. If Graydon is in the city he will soon be captured."

Rachel ceased, and her mother exclaimed:

"We have come too late!"

"I am not sure of that."

"But they say they will soon have him."

"They also say they are not sure it was he."

"We know—or think we know—he is in New York. It must be true; he was seen. Why was he so rash as to appear in public?"

"It was night, and he probably thought he would be safe."

"There is no safety for one thus situated."

"I fear you are right."

"What can we do, Rachel?"

"I don't know. If we only dared to consult Mr. Proctor—"

"Not for the world!" cried the blind woman.

"He seems good and true—"

"He might be to the fortunate, but to the afflicted no one is good and true!" declared Mrs. Graydon, with the bitterness of sorrow.

"We must depend on ourselves. Oh! why was I so unlucky as to have my eye trouble take a turn for the worse just when it bade fair to be cured, and when I needed my vision so much? I am so horribly helpless! Rachel, what can we do? We must help Oliver, but how? What can we do? In mercy's name, suggest something."

"We can only search for father."

"Where?"

"Alas! I don't know!"

And Rachel burst into tears.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DETECTIVE OVERHEARS SOMETHING.

DOWN in the lower part of the city the Rushalong Club had its quarters. The name of the organization told but little, but it was simply a political club which did, indeed, rush things along when a campaign was in progress. It did not fall to pieces when politics declined, but the spacious rooms of the organization were always open to members and friends.

On the evening following the scenes last recorded two men were seated in one of the rooms.

They were Perkins Crosby and Henry Kneeland. The latter was a member, and a zealous worker for the political party he favored, and Crosby had been introduced by another member under circumstances which gave him the run of the club.

Kneeland and Crosby had become somewhat acquainted, and this evening they were having a smoke in company, heedless of the few other persons present.

The younger man had little knowledge of his companion, but he was observing enough to set Crosby down as a very sharp person, and he was, too, inclined to learn more of him on account of certain things which had come to his knowledge.

Sharp as Crosby was, Kneeland intended to make a dollar out of him. It was Kneeland's business to live by his wits.

It was after a somewhat prolonged conversation that he approached the subject in hand.

"I notice that there is now hope of catching the escaped convict, Oliver Graydon," Kneeland remarked, with a yawn.

Perkins opened his little eyes a trifle wider, and surveyed his companion critically. He did not care to talk about Graydon.

"I had not noticed," he answered.

"Don't you feel interested?"

"No."

"You ought to."

"Why?"

"You are a brother of Walker Crosby."

"What has that to do with Graydon?"

"Your brother had a good deal to do with him."

"I have not said that I have any brother," curtly replied Perkins.

"It is not necessary; I know you have."

"I didn't know I had met a family historian," snapped the older man.

"You have," was the calm answer. "I have some information as to the points of this case. I know how Oliver Graydon went to Sing Sing."

"Did he go in a private carriage, or the Black Maria?" sneered Perkins.

"I did not mean that; the point is trivial. What I did mean was this: I know what the charge was against Graydon, and how well it was founded."

"I feel no interest in this."

"I do, and you will pardon me for speaking of it. I think Graydon was innocent of the crime which sent him to Sing Sing."

The remark made a sensation. Perkins Crosby looked almost startled, and, unknown to either of the others, somebody else was at once deeply interested. Close to them sat a man who had been doing nothing for some time. He was screened from their view by draperies which helped to divide the two rooms, but was as well able to listen as if he were by their side. He was a member and frequenter of the club, but a very quiet one at all times. His name was Joseph Randall, and some people knew him as a detective, though this fact was not generally known.

Mr. Randall, as an officer, found the last declaration worthy of more notice.

Perkins Crosby eyed Kneeland sharply and then curtly replied:

"I was not aware you were a police spy."

"I am nothing of the sort," answered Kneeland.

"Then why are you interested?"

"I simply made a statement. I say that I believe Graydon was sent to Sing Sing innocent of the crime charged against him."

"Humph!"

"He was promoter and manager of a Western land scheme, or something of the sort. When he went to prison it was under charge of having embezzled from the concern."

"The law said he was guilty."

"Mr. Crosby, you have a brother. He

hated Graydon because he frustrated Walker in his ambition to be a political light. My information is to the effect that Walker Crosby put up a job on an innocent man, and that Graydon was perfectly honest."

"It's a lie!" cried Perkins.

"Perhaps."

"Who told you this?"

"I decline to say. Let it suffice that I have been told so, and that it does not place Walker Crosby in a good light."

"Bah! Nonsense!"

"Graydon is now a fugitive."

"Yes."

"Suppose that proof was vouchsafed that he was innocent? He would be a free man lawfully as well as by his own efforts."

"You talk folly."

"And Walker Crosby would take his place in the dock."

"What are you driving at?" sharply demanded Crosby.

"Silence is golden; silence is worth buying."

"In brief, you want to be paid for keeping your mouth shut?"

"Yes."

"Noble ambition!"

"I am not rich, nor have I regular employment. I live by my wits. I make no claims to honor—I haven't any, I reckon. Walker Crosby's money is as good as anybody's. I want to see him."

"I don't know where he is."

"You can find him."

"I do not know how until he sees fit to show up. He was to meet me here in New York, but he has not come. I do not know what keeps him. I am surprised at his prolonged absence."

"Write to him."

"He has no regular address, New York being his home as far as he has one. His present absence is very singular."

"He is squeezing some poor wretch who can't raise money to buy Walker's soul," sneered Kneeland. "Well, Crosby, I want to see your brother as soon as he returns. Will you help me to do it?"

"Yes."

"No treachery, now."

"Certainly not."

"It will be best for Walker to see me. He has everything to gain by it. If I speak out to the world it will go hard with him, but if he sees fit to pay me for keeping mum, I am with him. My silence is to be bought cheap. See?"

"Yes."

"That's all for now."

Kneeland looked at his watch, remarked that he had an engagement and would go to keep it, and left the club-house.

Joseph Randall had overheard all this, but he also heard more. The long, sallow face of Perkins Crosby was working with passion.

"The knave!—the wretch!" he muttered, glaring after Kneeland.

The detective smiled. From what he had heard he did not believe the speaker was the proper man to use terms reflecting on another person's honor.

"So he would play the blackmailer!" added Perkins. "We will see about that! Walker will not give up a dollar without a fight for it, and I believe he will crush this upstart. Kneeland thinks himself a cunning rogue, but he will find he can't match the Crosby brains. The audacity of the fellow! We will see if he can beat us!"

Boastful as this speech was, Perkins evidently felt a good deal wrought up by the late interview. He fidgeted about for a few moments, and then rose and went out.

Randall promptly followed.

"You are a good man to watch," he murmured.

CHAPTER XIV.

GETTING INTO THE GAME.

THE marked man left the building without giving signs of expected danger, and the detective anticipated no collision.

Perkins did not seem to have any definite object in view, for he walked off with lowered head, and the detective did not have difficulty in keeping on his trail unseen.

For several blocks the pursuit went on, and then Crosby was aroused from his abstraction. Two rough-looking men accosted

him. Randall's first impression was that they were toughs who intended to commit an assault, but Perkins appeared to recognize them at once, and to greet them with a certain degree of good will.

The trio began to talk earnestly.

Randall was not sure he had any interest in this matter, but as he had taken up Crosby's case he was not disposed to let the chance pass by to keep on.

Circumstances made it possible for him to get near them without creating notice, and this he hastened to do. He secured a place where he could listen to all they said. The first words were decidedly of interest.

"Wal, boss," remarked one of the rough-looking fellows, "we kin help ye ef you wish."

"I have had a specimen of your skill," snapped Perkins.

"Say, now, don't refer ter that; it ain't fair. You know the elements was ag'in us that night. You hired us ter steal the gal—"

"Hush!" cautioned Perkins.

"Oh! nobody's goin' ter listen ter us, old man. Wal, we did w'ot we was hired ter do, an' we got out on the river all right, and then we got held up."

"I should say you did!" curtly agreed Perkins. "A man and a boy took the girl from you."

"How did they do it? Would they have done it ef the river hadn't heaved up, turned our boat over an' spilled us inter the drink? Wal, you bet yer Sheepshead winner they wouldn't!"

"Never mind; you lost her—"

"Yes, an' we now tell you she is found again. Miss Hope an' her ma is right where we kin put our fingers on 'em when we see fit, an' ef you pay the price there ain't no reason why you shouldn't know where they be."

"Dickey Bond, do you tell the truth?" asked Perkins, more eagerly.

"Ask Mike O'Smith."

Dickey motioned to his companion as if the word of that person settled it all. Possibly this was so, but, if correct, his veracity was better than his clothes. Mr. O'Smith went Dickey several better on dilapidation of wardrobe.

"Where are the women?" inquired Perkins.

"A ten-dollar Government sweet william note will tell ye."

Perkins pulled out a bill and handed it to the vagabond.

"You might possibly tell the truth by accident," he cynically remarked. "Try it!"

"Let me touch the tenner," requested Dickey, greedily.

"Talk, first."

"Don't you trust me?"

"I do not."

"Pretty man, you be, ter talk o' lame honor! S'pose I go ter the perleee an' tell how you used Susanna Trull an' her peach-blow daughter? As soon as they landed from the ocean steamer you had me an' Michael kidnap the gal. Why? What bug hev you got a-gnawin' ag'in the two women's happiness? What dark an' deadly secret broods like a vulture—"

"Come, come, Dick; you speak like a mixture of fool an' poet. Drop it! I don't like the style. It is none of your business why I wanted her girl out of sight. I hired you to do a job, and, though you made a mess of it, you received your pay. Let that suffice. However, we will not quarrel over small things. Here is your ten dollars."

Dickey took it with alacrity.

"Old man, you are a hummer!" he declared.

"Now, talk!" was Perkins's terse rejoinder.

"Wal, sir, the women are housed with one Montgomery Call."

"What?"

"They have found the man they sought."

"They are there already?"

"They be, sir."

"But where does Montgomery Call live?"

"Here is his palace address."

Dickey handed over a grimy card, and Perkins did not seem to have any difficulty in deciphering the writing upon it.

"Is this correct?" he asked.

"It is, sir."

"If I find you have deceived me—"

"Your Honor, it ain't our way," asserted Dickey, aggrieved. "The deal is a straight one."

Perkins pocketed the card.

"So they have got to him, in spite of me," he mused, aloud.

"So it seems."

Crosby meditated, and then suddenly aroused.

"It is just possible that I may want you again, later on," he added. "If I do I will come to you. In the mean time, if you want to be successful in business, see that you don't undermine me. I will pay you more than anybody else can."

"We kin take as much from you as anybody else can," frankly replied Dickey.

Perkins wanted to go, and he soon went. Rapidly he walked off down the street, leaving the two vagabonds behind him. Joseph Randall remained also. The detective believed the two men of more interest than the one. He wished to learn where they made their quarters.

Randall had listened to the conversation with more than ordinary interest. Susanna Trull and her daughter were clients of his, and he had gained a good deal of light.

The kidnapping of Hope was explained, though the animus of the act was left more in the dark than ever. How did Perkins happen to come into the game? What grudge had he against Mrs. Trull and her daughter?

"That is something they probably can explain—if they will," decided Randall. "I will let it rest for now."

Dickey and Mike were happy with their money. They first went to a saloon and took a drink. Then they took two more drinks. By that time the keen edge of their thirst had been blunted, and they went to the street and wandered on in a happy frame of mind.

The detective was not surprised to see that their course was toward the Bowery.

When that famous thoroughfare was reached they paused on the western sidewalk and looked up toward the windows of a lodging-house with the air of men near home. A patrolman passed carelessly by. He noticed them, but they were only two off the many ill-clad men on the street, and he gave them no thought.

Detective Randall watched more closely.

"Skimmer Nichols!"

He mumbled the name as a slight figure approached the pair, and it was, indeed, the young friend of Rodney Proctor. Skimmer had been surveying Dickey sharply, and he now walked up to him.

"Say!" he exclaimed, "hev you got over that biff yit?"

Dickey looked puzzled.

"What biff?" he inquired.

"I reckon you git so many o' them you don't remember. I mean, the fight you an' me an' two other men had on Broadway. You an' Henny Kneeland stacked up aginst me an' Rod Proctor. Remember how it come out?"

The tantalizing smile on the boy's face showed that he had only one object in making the talk, and he succeeded to a charm. Dickey looked aggrieved.

"Say, now," he remonstrated, "don't be fresh."

"We was a bit fresh then."

"You was," agreed Dickey.

"It's fresh," added Skimmer, "ter take a felier an' roll him all over the mud o' New York. Et sticks like a brother, an' there is a disgrace about gettin' licked that I can't stand."

The words and the smile that accompanied them irritated the vagabond, and his eyes began to twinkle ominously. He covertly doubled up his grimy fist.

"You had no business ter do it," he grumbled, "an' now I'll show you what I think of it!"

With this he swung his fist fiercely, aiming at Skimmer's head, but the boy ducked deftly and then laughed his scorn.

"Oh! say, where did you learn boxin'?" he asked.

"I'll break you all up!" asserted Dickey. "I'll lambast you so—"

Mike O'Smith caught the speaker's arm.

"Say, do ye want ter git arrested?" he asked. "Want ter have a cop onter you? Now, you just hustle inter the crib."

He pulled Dickey into the doorway, and sight of an approaching roundsman decided Dickey. He followed the good advice, and the two vagabonds disappeared into the lodging-house.

The brief excitement was over, and Randall knew he had seen the last of his game for the night. Skimmer stood with a grin on his sharp face, taking boyish delight in having annoyed the vagabond, and Detective Joe joined him with hopes of gaining some light.

"You have scored a point," remarked Randall.

Skimmer looked at him sharply.

"Hullo! is it you, boss? Got a warrant for my arrest?"

"Do you deserve one?"

"Ef I do, you can't make me confess it. I'm jest out fer fun, an' this is the place ter find it. Look around ye! See the lights of the Bowery smile onter you like a bride onter a lover. See the rags, shags an' other things sail by with humans inside o' them. This is life, an' I'm tellin' of ye so, Joseph!"

The detective did not care for generalities, and ignored these comments.

"You don't seem to love the man who went in just now."

"Had a scrap with him once."

"How was that?"

"Oh! he was mean ter some women folks, an' me an' a pard walked all over him."

"Who were the women folks?"

Skimmer seemed suddenly to grow cautious.

"Jest some females o' high degree."

Nothing feeds curiosity so much as evasion, and Randall became interested in the case.

"I have about all I can attend to," he thought, "to run down Oliver Graydon, but this may amuse me for a moment." Then he added, aloud, and very persuasively: "Come, let me have the story!"

CHAPTER XV.

A DANGEROUS CALLER.

THE convict who had escaped from Sing Sing remained master of the Montgomery Call house. Despite the new and worrisome turn of affairs nobody had challenged his right there, and Mrs. Susanna Trull was as peaceful as he could wish.

She had the run of the house, too, and he had handed over enough of Montgomery Call's money to give her chance to shop and engage dressmakers. In doing this she seemed content. How long it would last he did not know.

He avoided both Susanna and Hope as much as possible, but they all met at the table. Susanna had assumed place as mistress of the house. She gave orders to the servants, and did it well, too. They called her "Mrs. Call," and she seemed firmly installed as Mrs. Call.

Sometimes Oliver Graydon meditated on the woman he had so freely accepted as Montgomery Call's wife, but he did it chiefly in reference to her possible capabilities for doing him harm.

Really, he cared little for her claims, just or unjust, for he had too much else to think of.

Time was wearing on, and he remained unsuspected. The rumor that the escaped convict had been seen in Central Park had stirred up the city officers, but it influenced other officers but little, and each day there were wild rumors that the fugitive had been seen at other points.

Men were arrested on suspicion as far west as Ohio.

Thus far all the hunters were at sea, but Graydon was not at ease. Any one of several different things might happen to ruin him.

Somebody might come along who would declare he was not Montgomery Call, or the body of the genuine Call might be found in the river, or the officers from Sing Sing might ferret the impostor out, or the zeal of Joseph Randall to capture the fugitive might be rewarded unexpectedly.

From the hour when Graydon sat and talked with the detective about the Sing Sing convict, the end had seemed very near.

Another shock was in store for the impostor, and it came the day after the events last recorded.

Feeling the need of fresh air, Graydon had gone out into the back yard. Unknown to him the door-bell rung while he was thus occupied. The servant escorted a caller to the parlor, and then went up-stairs to summon the supposed Mr. Call. While he was above Graydon re-entered the house.

He entered the parlor.

When he saw a man there he stopped short, but it was too late to retreat. The caller rose, and Graydon was in for the interview.

"Mr. Montgomery Call?" questioned the stranger.

"Yes," faintly admitted the convict.

"I came on business."

"I am very busy just now—"

"Pardon me, but so am I. I will not detain you longer than is necessary, and I will leave it to you to say how long I shall stay."

Graydon sighed. He did not want to see anybody, but this matter might possibly soon be ended.

"I will hear your business," he answered.

"The matter is easily explained," evenly pursued the visitor. "It is simple; very simple. First as to my name."

Graydon had begun to be curious as to the name. The window-shades were lowered, and the room was thus rendered dusky, though not dark. He could see that the stranger was a tall, lank man, with a thin, long face. The whole contour of body and face was suggestive, and Graydon had grown uneasy under the recollections brought up.

The stranger looked like somebody he had seen before, and he was trying to quiet his apprehensions, and assure himself it was only a chance resemblance, when that person approached the subject of the name.

He finished in the same easy manner:

"My name is Perkins Crosby."

Once Graydon gasped for breath, and then he sat silent. He was speechless; he was too much frightened to have summoned words, even if they had been essential.

He had casually heard of Perkins Crosby before, though they never had met. He knew him to be brother to Walker Crosby, and rumor said the brothers were alike in meanness and baseness.

But, it was not that of which the escaped convict thought at this juncture.

"I am discovered!"

Such was the thought that flashed into Graydon's mind, and he did not doubt that it was a correct explanation of Crosby's presence. He believed he was run down, at last.

Shivering, he sat silent before his visitor.

Having waited in vain for a reply, Perkins added:

"Have you ever heard the name?"

Graydon made a great effort and managed to whisper:

"No."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"I thought it would be otherwise."

"I never heard of you."

The first shock was over, and as the convict saw the necessity of adhering to his statement, he spoke with dogged firmness.

"Perkins Crosby is the name; Perkins Crosby," reiterated the visitor. "Didn't you ever know anybody named Crosby?"

"No!"

"It's a common name."

"I can't help that; I never knew anybody thus named."

Graydon was on the rack, and he bade fair to be kept there, but the next words from his companion began to dispel the darkness a little, in one respect.

"If you had, it might aid you to place me. I did not intend to say you had known me. Quite the contrary. If you ever heard of me it has been very recently."

Graydon was puzzled. He did not understand this assertion.

"From whom should I hear of you?"

"Mrs. Montgomery Call, alias Susanna Trull."

"Indeed! What should she tell me of you?"

"I have been in England; I saw her there. She knows me."

Perkins leaned forward in his chair and seemed to expect this to settle everything. It settled nothing. It added to Graydon's bewilderment. With matters turned in a

new channel he would have been happy, but he began to suspect a plot with Susanna as an accessory.

"You will have to be more explicit," he answered.

"Well, by Jove! if she has not told of me it is peculiar. I will explain. I met her in England, and it was through our talk that she was able to learn that the Simeon Trull who married her years before had, really, been named Montgomery Call. I, on the other hand, was surprised to learn that Mr. Call, of New York, was not a dull bachelor."

"What did you know of Mr. Call, of New York?"

"Nothing, direct, but I heard of him. Since you have not heard of the story before, I will give an outline of it."

"Do so."

"It was the veriest chance that all the facts about your life in England, twenty years ago, came out. When they did, I agreed to pilot your wife to you—I knew it would be a great pleasure to you to see her again."

Graydon ignored the sneer and silently motioned Perkins to proceed.

"All went well until I tried to make terms with the lady. I had told her that you were in New York; I declined to tell her more—I am frank with you, you see—until she had signed a paper agreeing to pay me five thousand dollars as a reward for my services."

"Well?"

"She declined point blank. Fact is, she thought she had the clue at her fingers' ends, and she was not going to pay me a red cent. The result you can guess. I sailed for New York and left her there in the land of Johnny Bull."

"She seems to have got here, just the same."

"She has. No doubt you are overjoyed."

"I try to keep my exhilaration in due bounds."

"The family is reunited. What are you going to do for me?"

"For you? Nothing."

"But I brought you together."

"Is that your only claim?"

"Yes."

"Then I fear I shall have to imitate Susanna and deny to pay you for doing good."

Again Perkins moved forward in his chair.

"Mr. Call," he continued, "what about Edgeheath Park?"

"Well, what about it?"

"And Morris Glynn?"

"I never heard of either."

"Oh! come, now, you put it ridiculously strong."

"I tell the truth."

"Mr. Call, all that matter is in my hands—"

"It is not in mine; I know nothing about it."

"By Jove! I do!" exclaimed Perkins. "I know you murdered Morris Glynn, in England, and that it was the reason why you fled to America!"

CHAPTER XVI.

HEIR TO ANOTHER'S SINS.

PERKINS CROSBY had grown impatient, and now blurted out the truth with startling abruptness. With undisguised hostility he bent his keen gaze upon Graydon, and clearly expected to crush him.

Graydon was startled. He knew nothing of Morris Glynn, but it was no trivial thing to hear such a charge. He held to his course, however.

"I have no knowledge whatever of the affair."

"It will quicken your recollection when you go back to England, extradited for the murder of Glynn."

"Yes—when I do."

"Perhaps you think it can't be proved against you."

"I do think so."

"I can give every item of proof."

"Wrong. You cannot; it is not true."

"Look you!" cried Perkins, angrily. "I can tell the whole story. You went to England and married Susanna under the name of Simeon Trull. She was far beneath you, and you did not want to acknowledge the

marriage publicly. You purchased a small estate and settled down, and all went merrily for awhile. You were not wholly a villain, and you settled your real estate on your wife."

"You wander from Morris Glynn."

"You shall see. You and he gambled, and he won all your property in England, and had more of a debt to satisfy. He demanded that you deed over the homestead to him. You and he quarreled over it, and you shot him to death in Edgeheath Park."

"Quite a romance."

"When he was dead you saw that you must get out of the country. You lacked the money to do it with, and you could not wait for remittances from New York. You played the villain and made your wife sign a mortgage without letting her know what it was. With this paper you raised the money and fled to this country. You left your wife and child in want and penury, and you left the police vainly hunting for the man who murdered Morris Glynn. You were safe here, but the blood of your victim will have recompense, sooner or later!"

Perkins ceased and sat back in his chair.

Graydon remained looking at him with a species of fascination.

Perkins had been dramatic of manner, and the story told.

Graydon looked pale, and he felt frightened.

Had he sunk his own identity and danger, briefly, only to shoulder the sins of another?

He began to see that Montgomery Call was not a man whose lot it was pleasure to assume.

A slow smile crept over the visitor's face. He saw he had made an impression, and he was gratified at the result.

"Murder is an ugly word!" he added.

"Man!" retorted Graydon, "I deny all you have said."

"Go back to England and convince them!"

"Thank you; I prefer to remain where I am."

"You will go back."

"How do you know?"

"I will go to the police."

"Ah! now I begin to see."

"You ought to, for I do not intend to be hazy. Pay me to keep still and you are safe. Refuse, and I go to the police."

There could be no complaint that Perkins Crosby had failed to make himself plain. Graydon had no detailed account of the matters in which, according to allegation, Montgomery Call had played so important a part, but he knew the outline perfectly.

"This is blackmail," remonstrated Graydon.

"It is my way of filling an empty pocket," frankly returned Perkins.

"I will denounce you—"

"Do so! Come with me to the police. You can tell of my reprehensible blackmailing scheme, and I will tell about the man you murdered."

Graydon gave it up. Whatever might be the merits of the English case, he dared not go to the police. On the contrary, he dared not go out of the house.

He remembered Sing Sing.

"What do you want?" he sullenly asked.

"Money!"

"How much?"

"Five thousand."

"I haven't it."

"You are rich—"

"So report says. Report exaggerates. Just now, too, I have less than usual. Mrs. Trull has shown a disposition to buy out all of New York, and it has taken money."

"So you refuse? Then I will go—"

"Wait!"

"Well?"

"I can give you fifty dollars, to-day—"

"Fifty dollars to hide a murder secret!"

"I said, fifty to-day. More shall follow, but you will have to let me get it as I can. I can't get it all now—that's decided. I will assuage your craving if time is allowed me."

It was all Graydon could do; to refuse meant to encounter the police, and at once go back to Sing Sing. His old term there did not seem so dreadful to him as it had once done, but he remembered the fight with Walker Crosby on the river. He knew why Walker did not return to New York.

Perkins was a good student of men, and he decided that victory was his. With due caution of manner he acceded to the plan, and the bargain was bound by the payment of the specified sum.

He lingered for some time to talk the subject over, and then took his departure.

"Well, well!" muttered Graydon, "what will come next? I have assumed Montgomery Call's name, his riches, his wife and child, and now it seems I must assume his sins. This is amazing. What next?"

The escaped convict paced the floor for some minutes, and then arrived at a decision. He would see Susanna. She had not mentioned the murder of Morris Glynn, and he wanted to be sure all was as alleged before he paid too much to Perkins Crosby.

He went to Mrs. Trull.

He found her and Hope busy over some new dresses, but Mrs. Trull was so pleased by this, his first visit to her, that she laid them aside and set out to be agreeable.

As skillfully as possible Graydon wound around to the business of the visit. He spoke of England, and of the past, and then neared the point gradually. He learned, first, that their old home in England was called Edgeheath Park, and that it had gone out of Mrs. Trull's hands when Mr. Trull fled from her. She spoke of it tearfully, but said she was willing to overlook the past.

"Did I leave any creditors in England?" asked Graydon.

"Not to my knowledge."

"Would it be safe for me to go back there now?"

Mrs. Trull looked at him quickly.

"Do you want to go?"

"Would it be safe?"

"I do not think any creditors would trouble you."

There was a noticeable emphasis on the word "creditors."

"Would anybody?"

Mrs. Trull surveyed him in silence. She was not a brainy woman, and most of the small intelligence she had ran to cunning. How well she sized up the present situation it was hard to tell, for her dull face was one which naturally hid her thoughts.

Graydon waited patiently, and she finally spoke.

"How about Morris Glynn?" she asked.

Graydon was disappointed. He had hoped against hope that Perkins Crosby had spoken falsely.

"Isn't that old case blown over?" he asked.

"How can it blow over?"

"Glynn was not worth all this disturbance."

"It was said at the old home that you murdered him!" bluntly declared Mrs. Trull.

"Nonsense!"

"I saw you strike him."

"Never mind!" hastily interrupted Graydon. "So they remember it, do they?"

"Yes."

"Then I will not return to England."

"The wisest thing to do is to remain quiet," responded Susanna. "It would break my heart if that old charge came up."

"No doubt."

"We can be very happy here."

Graydon glanced at the pile of new dresses.

"So I see."

"Now, if you would only love me—"

He rose hastily.

"I have an engagement which I must attend to," he replied. "You will have to excuse me for the present."

He left the room and returned to his own quarters.

"Well, I am filling a fine role!" he muttered. "Montgomery Call has led a shady life, and now I am saddled with all of his misdemeanors. A deserted wife, and a man killed. I could despise such a man if—"

His mind turned from Call's case to his own. The blackness of despair came over him, and he bitterly added:

"If I had not killed a man, myself!"

He raised his hands on high and his lips moved with words too deep for utterance. That scene by the river preyed constantly upon him. He had been an honored, prosperous man until Walker Crosby came into his life and ruined him out of petty spite.

Walker's work had been fiendish, but even this did not wholly clear Graydon in his own eyes. He had taken human life!

The horror of the thought was a constant nightmare to him.

For a long time he paced the room, trying to decide what to do. It was not a question of what the real Montgomery Call would have done if he had been there, but of his own salvation.

"I can't defy Perkins Crosby," was Graydon's decision. "In fact, I must bow my knee meekly to all who seek to prey upon me; I must not be arrested for Call's sins, or my own sins will find me out. I must let Mrs. Trull reign here, and Perkins Crosby must be kept off of my neck. It means ruin to go to a police-station."

At that moment the convict was in doubt if he was doing well to hold to Montgomery Call's identity, but when he thought of the only other resource—flight from the city—he weakened.

He dared not flee, he must remain and fight the battle out as long as possible.

"I wish I knew how it is with my loved ones," he soliloquized, gloomily. "Poor Rachel!—poor, dear wife! I would gladly watch over them, but they are many miles away from here."

Another turn across the room.

"At least," he added, "they are safe. They are far away."

CHAPTER XVII.

STARTLING ENCOUNTERS.

EVER since his assumption of the role of Montgomery Call the escaped convict had kept close to the house. He had not dared to go outside, and all that he needed done for him had been done by Bildad. This hermit life was even more pronounced than that which the real Mr. Call had led, but the impostor accounted for it by the plea that he was not yet recovered from his accident.

Now, however, the close confinement was telling on him. True, it was no more than he had endured in Sing Sing, but it was hard to keep up what had been so irksome in the prison.

For some time he had been considering a question—dared he go out? In spite of the danger he had determined to get a breath of fresh air, and the time and place had been decided upon.

The place was Central Park.

He did not forget that rumor had gone abroad that the escaped convict had been seen in the Park, but even the most sanguine of the city police had abandoned that rumor as utterly groundless—rumor had it that Graydon had been seen in a dozen different places in the State of New York, in Connecticut and New Jersey.

They had learned to distrust these reports, and the newspapers stated that the Central Park clue was wholly exploded.

Hence, Graydon had determined to take an airing in the Park, the selected time being daybreak of the morning. He intended to be home before the average citizen had his eyes well open.

He went the next morning.

Bildad had been very much surprised when he was directed to engage a carriage and have it at the door at a time previous to daylight, and he was the more surprised when he learned that his master was going to do his own driving.

However, Bildad was obedient, and he did his part well. When morning came he finished up his part, and saw Graydon drive off. Bildad shook his head.

"He ain't got over that accident in the river yet," was his comment. "He ain't been at all like himself sence. Why, ef I didn't know how easy it was to get off one's base, I should really think that the master got changed for somebody else while he was in the river. That play of 'Faust' has some queer things in it. I don't know but the master has done something like that."

Bildad did not know exactly what he meant, and, better still, he was not a man to gossip.

Wonder over the supposed Mr. Call's change of manner he had, but even to the other servants he had done no tattling.

Graydon drove away rapidly. There was not much stir on the street then, but he

longed to get where there was less. As soon as possible he reached the Park, and then took one of the drives.

Here there was more freedom, and more room, and fewer men. He bowled along with the gray of morning just tinting the sky, and the robins caroling in the trees, and the fresh air gave him new life and strength.

"It is a happy man who can enjoy all the blessings of open air," he murmured.

For some time he kept the horse going at a rapid pace which was in keeping with his own exhilaration, but, finally, his mind wandered from the present and the pace of the animal slackened.

It was not until they relapsed into a walk that Graydon aroused. He then saw they had reached a slight rise of land, and the horse was taking advantage of the easy driver.

The latter was about to hasten their speed when they turned one of the numerous bends in the course, and he was surprised to see two ladies sitting on a bench.

Ordinarily he would have found no interest in this, but the hour was so early that the incident was put out of the common run. Wondering what had brought them to the heart of Central Park at daybreak, he looked at them closely.

They returned his regard.

They faced each other, only a few yards apart.

The effect on both parties was surprising.

Graydon gave a violent start, and one of the ladies sprung to her feet.

"Father!" she exclaimed.

Graydon was astounded and frightened. His daughter Rachel was before him.

He sat like one turned to stone, and if the horse had not acted independent of his master's mind, they would have come to a full stop. As it was, the slow walk was kept up.

Rachel had taken a step forward. Mrs. Graydon, too, had leaped to her feet, her face paling and her manner one of extreme agitation, and she now cried:

"What? What did you say, Rachel? Your father? Where, where?"

The incoherent utterance of his wife broke the spell which was upon Graydon, but did not restore him to self-possession, and when his horse, having surmounted the hill, voluntarily struck into a trot, the driver willingly let him go. Graydon's impulse then was to flee from his loved ones as they were his bitter foes.

Perhaps a part of his nervous tension was communicated to the horse, for it quickened its pace still more and went bowling away at a lively clip.

Rachel stood silent, too much surprised to speak.

Graydon did not look back, and another bend in the drive soon took him beyond their sight.

He was thoroughly scared and unnerved, and his wits were slow to work. When they did he pulled in his animal.

"Why did I flee from them?" he muttered. "Why should I be afraid of the only ones who love me? It was a wild freak. I will return to them."

He half handled the reins to that end, but then came a new thought.

"I can't do it. They do not know about Walker Crosby."

The recollection fell heavily upon him, and his expression was one of keen agony.

"I can never see Mary and Rachel again," he decided. "They could look lovingly in the face of the convict, and well they might, for he went to Sing Sing an innocent man; but now—Oh! may Providence help us all!—the blood of Walker Crosby is on my hands, and Mary and Rachel must never see one so accursed!"

Graydon's head drooped. Bitterly did he repent of the past. Far better, he thought, would it have been had he remained in prison. By his escape he had put a barrier between himself and those he loved. He would gladly have seen Walker Crosby alive then, even if it put him back in Sing Sing.

"Come what may," he reiterated, "they must not see me again. I am as one dead to them!"

Presently he aroused enough to consider their presence in New York. He was both worried and startled because it was so. He was shrewd enough to understand that it

was the outcome of his sending money to them from the city, but he felt that they would be subjected to many perils now they had come.

"They must go back," he decided. "But how can I work it?"

It was a question hard to answer, and it occupied his time until he had a new alarm.

His horse came to a stop, and he looked up to see a Park policeman full in his path. The man in gray looked at him sharply.

"Say," he spoke, "who are you, anyhow?"

It was a blunt question, even for a Park policeman, who, at the best, is a lordly creature; and Graydon scented danger. Suspicion was in every line of the man's face.

Graydon felt as if his heart had stopped beating, but he made a desperate effort to be calm. Upon his efforts now depended his safety.

"What's that?" he coldly asked.

"Who are you?"

"Well, that's a fine way to accost a gentleman!"

The policeman recollected himself.

"I beg your pardon, if I am wrong, but you look like somebody—"

He hesitated and seemed unable to finish to his satisfaction.

"I look like somebody, do I?" returned Graydon, attempting to be sarcastic. "Remarkable fact! Does it justify you in insulting me? I shall report your insolence."

"Hang it all! are you Graydon, the escaped convict, or are you not?" blurted the officer.

"Your question would be the worst of insults if it did not possess an element of the ridiculous. To satisfy you I will say that I am not. I have cleared myself—how are you going to do the same? Do you expect to be on the force another day, after having insulted a gentleman in this way?"

The officer grew doggedly firm.

"I may be wrong, but I am going to know before I let you off. You come with me to the Arsenal. You look like Graydon's pictures, and I believe I have bagged the game so many men covet. If you are innocent, you have only to prove it. Come to the Arsenal."

"Wait!"

"Well?"

"Take your hand from my rein or I will knock you down!"

"You will, eh?"

"I will. I am not going to be taken to your superiors to please your whim—"

"You will go there, whether you like it or not."

As indicated by Graydon's words, the officer had taken new and tenacious hold on the rein. He intended to keep it, as the rider plainly saw. Graydon saw more. If he was taken to the Arsenal trouble would follow.

To attempt to prove that he was not the escaped convict, but Montgomery Call, would probably be to prove that he was not Call.

He believed there was but one way out of the dilemma.

His horse was a restive, high metled animal, and, when Graydon suddenly reached forward and gave it a cut with the whip, it responded so violently that he was nearly flung from his vehicle under the great force of its forward plunge.

For several moments he was barely able to hang on, but when he recovered his balance there was a goodly stretch of ground between themselves and the spot from which they had started.

He looked back.

The officer sprawled in the drive, and his attempts to rise were so feeble and uncertain that Graydon perceived he was a good deal shaken. Anyhow, he had a start, and he did not let the chance slip.

Encouraging the horse, they flew along until half a mile had been put between them and the officer.

All the while the escaped convict had been in a panic, but he gradually recovered his wits. He was driving too fast to be safe. He moderated his speed and went on successfully.

"I am heading homeward," he commented unsteadily, "and I will keep the course. My one great ambition now is to get out of public sight."

CHAPTER XVIII.
TOO MUCH OF CROSBY.

WHEN the limits of the Park were reached, and Graydon drove out on the street, he had new cause for alarm. It was still too early for many persons to be astir, but there were blue-coated policemen to be passed, and the escaped convict had no courage left.

Every man, no matter how innocent he might have seemed to one not in dread of law, now appeared to regard the horseman suspiciously, and every corner had its terror.

Graydon felt that, somewhere along the road, discovery was to come.

He was wrong in this, for he reached the stable without mishap, and, returning the horse, went safely to the Call house. He breathed a sigh of relief when the door closed with him on the inner side.

Bildad met him in the lower hall.

"Had a fine ride, sir?" asked the servitor.

"Great!"

"You look better for it."

"No doubt."

"It must have been nice driving, so early."

"It was."

"Going to make it a regular thing, sir?"

"I shall consider the point."

Graydon escaped from the colored man and went to his private room. If he had looked in the glass he would have found that Bildad had told a polite fiction when he said his master looked the better for the drive—Graydon's face was ashen. He did not look in the glass, but sunk into a chair, weak and nervous.

"A close call," he murmured; "a close call. I shall take no more risks."

He considered the situation, and then, with the ingenuity of fear, found a fresh dread.

"What if that Park officer followed me home?"

He sprung up and went to the window, but the street had only a few careless passers. If he had been pursued there was nothing to show the fact. Still, he could not shake off the alarm, and it was some time before he became composed enough to have breakfast.

Afterward, he meditated. He was worried and frightened to know that his wife and daughter were in New York. He felt that they were not in any way fit to cope with the dangers of the city, and there was no knowing what would happen to them.

"It was the sending of the money that sent them here. They decided that I must be where the money came from. I wonder if they recognized me so positively that they will not be shaken in the belief, or will they be satisfied, on second thought, to regard it as a mistaken recognition?"

He hoped that the question could be answered in the affirmative, but his faith was not strong.

"I will send another sum of money to the old home," he went on. "I will not refer to this meeting, and will give them the idea, in a brief note, that I do not know they have left there. More, I will write as if I have found a refuge in a suburban town, and have not been out of it at all. That may shake their faith in this morning's recognition."

He was planning this matter elaborately when Mrs. Trull put in an appearance. Since his own visit to mother and daughter Mrs. Trull had felt a good deal encouraged, and if it had not been for the ambition of her daughter, life in the house might have been very uneventful.

The elder woman had been so pleased at being received at all that she had not cared to go beyond the quiet of the home life, but she was not the only woman there.

On the present occasion she came to business with commendable promptness.

"I want to speak to you, Simeon," she remarked.

"Proceed!" replied Graydon, with a sigh.

"It is about our child."

"Our child?"

"Darling Hope."

Mrs. Trull had waxed sentimental since entering the house. Nobody was more surprised than Hope at the affection lavished on her.

"What about her?" asked Graydon.

"She is a young girl."

"True."

"Sweet and beautiful."

"Yes."

"You do not show much enthusiasm over your own child."

"Mine is not a sentimental nature, madam."

"It was once, Simeon—in our courting days. Don't you remember that you never could kiss me enough?"

"What about Hope?" inquired Graydon, hastily.

"She is charming, beautiful and young. Being young, she has the aspirations of her sex and of youth. Don't you think we ought to do something for her?"

"What?"

"Give her a coming-out party."

The secret was out, and Mrs. Trull braced herself to fight it out. Graydon stared at her blankly.

"Are you crazy?"

"Crazy?"

"I am a quiet man—"

"You are old, Simeon. Hope is young."

"Let her get a doll, then. I don't want any coming-out party, as you term it. What? Turn this house into a grizzly bear garden? Madam, the idea is preposterous."

Graydon had caught the line of action. It would not do to tell her that he could not afford to bring discovery on himself by inviting guests there, so he talked as the real Mr. Montgomery Call would probably have talked.

"Simeon," severely replied Mrs. Trull, "you are a hermit."

"I am."

"Dead to the world."

"I wish I were."

"You are. The narrow, contracted life you have led here has been one which has chilled the nobler part of your manhood. You must stop the river of selfishness, or it will flood its banks."

"Pray do not seek to be poetical."

"Don't seek to keep our sweet Hope in a nunnery!" snapped Mrs. Trull. "Be reasonable, be just, be human and noble. Remember how young our child is, and give her the latitude that other girls have. Give her a chance to receive the nobility of New York."

"How would I get them?"

"Invite them."

"You seem to have a wrong idea of my position, madam. I have no acquaintance, and what few persons I could summon by invitation are not of the sort you would wish to see. I could rely only upon a few eccentric bookworms I have met in libraries and like places."

"You are rich."

"No."

"I say you are!" declared Mrs. Trull, her temper rising. "You are a mean, stingy thing!—that's what you are. But Hope shall have a party, or I will make trouble for you."

Graydon would have been blind not to see that trouble was, indeed, imminent, and he governed himself accordingly.

"I do not want to deserve such a raking down as this," he replied, "and I will give due thought to the matter. Allow me a respite, and I will see what can be done."

Mrs. Trull eyed him searchingly.

"You and I must stick by each other," she finally added. "Perkins Crosby has been to see me."

"What?"

"He has, and he is trying to make up. More, he has brought a nice young man, and Hope's chance is before her. The young man has taken a strong fancy to her."

"Who is the young man?"

"His name is Henry Kneeland, and he is real nice."

"He must be, if he trains in Perkins Crosby's company. What new scheme has Perkins got under way?"

"He came to apologize for deserting us in England, and to make friends."

"Did he succeed?"

"Yes."

Graydon gazed meditatively at Mrs. Trull. She seemed to be truthful enough, and he could only suppose that she was being drawn into some one of Crosby's schemes. He wondered what new device the arch-plotter had under way.

"You had better let Perkins Crosby alone," was his advice. "A bigger knave does not exist, and if you get chummy with him he will bring us all to grief. Don't trust him."

"He questioned me a good deal about you," pursued Susanna.

"About me?"

"Yes; your life here in America."

Graydon grew freshly uneasy.

"What did he ask about that?"

"Some of the questions were queer. He wanted to know how long you had lived in this house; who knew you best; how long your servants had been with you, and if you had been at home every night of late. Then he spoke of your having fallen into the river from a boat, lately, and wanted to know who were with you then."

Graydon was at once on the alert. Living in constant dread, he saw danger at every turn. Why should Crosby ask about his trip on the river, and into the river, unless he had clue to the truth?

"What did you tell him?" he asked, breathlessly.

"What could I tell him? I knew nothing about it."

"Why did he ask?"

"I don't know."

"That man who was with him—Henry Kneeland—did he seem interested?"

"I didn't notice."

Graydon caught at every chance. He marked Kneeland down now as a detective, or as somebody who was acting for a detective. He grew suspicious in all ways. Mrs. Trull had brought Joseph Randall—an avowed detective—into the house. Had she brought another? If so, what meant this rush of officers?

"I am close to the rocks!" thought the fugitive.

"What about the party?" added Mrs. Trull, after a pause.

"You will have to postpone your ambition in this line. First, it is beyond my pocket, just now, to make any flourish. Next, it is not the season of year for such events. Why, it would be absurd now."

"It would break the ice."

"Wait until the time of ice. Don't think me unjust, but the time is not ripe. Let it rest awhile."

Susanna was not satisfied, but she acceded to his wishes, and they parted with some amicability on both sides, outwardly.

Graydon, however, was left more worried than ever. What did Crosby mean to do next? was his anxious question.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BOWERY VAGABOND NEGOTIATES.

It was evening, and Perkins Crosby was moving down the Bowery. His pointed face was thoughtful and cunning of expression, and it was clear he was considering something with rapt attention. This was not singular, for he was a born plotter. He had lived, by plotting.

He finally aroused and paused in front of a building which bore a sign of some pretension, announcing that it was a hotel. Perkins had gone along a shady path, but he had lived in decent quarters, and there was that in the appearance of the building which made him elevate his nose in disgust.

"Lower than a poor-house!" he muttered.

He referred to the social standing of the hotel. He suspected what it meant when he read that accommodations were to be had for fifteen and twenty cents for the night.

It was the way of the Bowery, and he walked in without more hesitation.

Ascending the stairs he entered the main room of the hotel. At the door he paused to look.

There was a long room with a generously-sized table in the center, benches along the wall and a few chairs, all of which seemed to have a bad case of rheumatism.

Patrons of the hotel were in this room. One was writing at the table, some were talking, but the greater part of them were sleeping on benches in various ungraceful positions. (It was a seedy, ill-looking lot, but they fitted the prices. Some were undoubtedly honest men. If others were the same, they were unfortunate in the faces which Nature had given them. All appeared to be in hard luck, financially.

At one side was a small room where the clerk of the place kept guard. In one sense he had the usual paraphernalia of a hotel clerk, but even there all was mean and cheap.

"Cattle!" muttered Perkins.

This supercilious gentleman was about to turn toward the office, from which the clerk was eying him with an appearance of suspicion, when a seedy man advanced from among the loungers. Perkins saw him and stood still. It was Dickey Bond, the vagabond.

He came to Perkins with easy assurance.

"Hallo, sport!" was his greeting.

"So you are here?"

"Sure!"

"A fine place to invite me to."

"It is pretty scrumptious."

"Rotten!"

"So is sauer-kraut, but it eats good."

"To business. Why am I here? We can't talk here."

"I told you I would have a private room—"

"Look you, my man—this isn't a plot to lure me in and do me up, is it?"

"What! here?—here in this luxurious boodwer?"

"I carry a revolver."

"Me, too."

"And I will shoot the man who tries to do me up."

Dickey tood Perkins by the button; then he spoke in a stage whisper:

"Nibsey, don't holler so loud. This crowd is peaceful as gambolin' lambs, but they is sensitive. Don't say shoot, or they may pull their guns. Be calm! All is serene, an' nobody is goin' ter do ye dirt. This is a square game, with the cards all face up. Nothin' could be safer than our soorey in the private room."

The vagabond was not the most convincing arguer, but he had now satisfied Perkins in a measure, and the latter said no more.

"Pay the clerk," added Dickey, "and the room is ours."

"I, pay? That's cool, but have your own way."

A key was obtained, and Dickey led the way with the air of a landed proprietor. They went to a small room which satisfied Perkins, and then sat down.

"I don't know why we are here," snapped the visitor. "All this seems to me a waste of time."

"You want ter do yer brother, Walker Crosby, a favor."

"Are you sure? Why not let him do it, himself?"

"Where is he?"

"Just what I don't know. Walker is not the man to neglect business, and, since he made the engagement with me, I don't see why he don't keep it. However, he isn't here, so drive away with your speech."

Perkins was ugly, but Dickey remained cool. The master of a situation can afford to be cool.

"It's like this," he explained. "I have been a poor man all my life—poor but honest—and now I want to rise in the world. I want to rise above the griping pangs o' poverty an' squalor. I want a place ter lay my head at night; a place ter eat three times a day"—here mournful Dickey grew animated—"an' a place ter drink several times a day. I want rest—"

"Come to business!"

"Boss," exclaimed the vagabond, suddenly, "I have papers to sell."

"What papers?"

"They prove that Oliver Graydon was innocent of the crime charged ter him when he was sent ter Sing Sing, an' that he never embezzled from the Western Land an' Investment Company he was the head of."

"The law said he did."

"I say that Walker Crosby put up a job on him."

"Prove it!" snarled Perkins.

"Here are the papers."

Dickey drew several documents from his pocket.

"Proof!" he tersely added.

"Let me see."

"You shall, but beware how ye monkey with 'em. They are my papers an'," added Dickey, impressively. "I will h'ist the man who tries ter crib them higher than the gee tower o' Brooklyn Bridge!"

Perkins could not complain that Dickey

was dallying any longer. The visitor grew somewhat meek, and then gave the required promise. That done, he was allowed to take the papers. He looked them over with the skill of a business person.

His countenance changed perceptibly, and Dickey smiled slightly.

When Perkins looked up his usually bold gaze wavered.

"What do you think?" asked the vagabond.

"Not worth the paper they are written on."

"Then give them back."

Dickey held out his hand, but Perkins drew the documents back.

"Wait!" he replied. "Of course we don't want any trouble about this. I feel sure that my brother would laugh at your claim, but I am not he. I don't want to take chances. Of course—"

Perkins was studying the papers sharply. Clearly, he was worried and puzzled by them. Suddenly he broke off and abruptly demanded:

"Where did you get them?"

"That don't go with the bargain. No matter where they came from; the papers are here ter answer for themselves."

"I don't see how any human being but Walker Crosby could have them," explosively declared Perkins. "Did you steal them?"

"No, sir; not. Most emphatically, no, sir! I would scorn it—"

"Has Walker Crosby met with foul play?"

"Dear sir, I have not the slightest idea of his affairs or whereabouts. I don't know that he has met with any mishap, I don't, really."

"The papers seem to have been in water. Where? How?"

"Don't know, really," innocently answered Dickey.

"Once," added Perkins, musingly, "I was down by the North River when a dead body was pulled out of the water. In the dead man's pocket was found a package of papers, and they looked very much like these—crumpled and soiled."

Dickey's gaze wandered. He seemed embarrassed. If Perkins had shrewdly followed up his speech by regarding his companion he might have found something in that guilty face. When he did look up, Dickey braced up remarkably and appeared innocent enough.

"Ef it's been a fishin' I don't know it," he answered.

"Tell me how you got it."

"We wander, boss. The point is that I have these jewels bright, an' the question is, do you want to buy?"

"Buy? No! They are all rubbish."

"They will prove that Oliver Graydon was innercent of embezzlement, an' that he fell inter a snare set by Walker Crosby!" swiftly returned Dickey. "They are in Walker's own writin', an' they condemn him right smart. Wouldn't that be proof enough fer a jedge an' jury?"

Perkins waxed crafty.

"Nothing of the sort, but, to avoid all trouble, I am willing to purchase. What's your price?"

"Five thousand dollars."

"What?"

"Five thousand Uncle Sammys."

"You are crazy."

"Boss, don't buy ef you don't feel like it—don't. I had just as soon sell to Oliver Graydon's widder—I mean, his wife. She will buy, I am guessin'!"

"Extortioner!"

"All right; I'll put them up."

Dickey made a motion to do as he said, but, suddenly, the papers disappeared violently from his grasp and a sharp voice exclaimed:

"To avoid trouble I will take these things. Consider negotiations off. I have the papers!"

Before them stood a ragged man and a ragged boy. The man held the coveted paper, and both of the new-comers faced them with cool assurance.

To an ordinary observer it was no more than the interference of two of the rundown patrons of the lodging-house, but Dickey saw far more. For a moment his face reflected only the consternation also pictured on Perkins's weazened visage, and then the vagabond seemed to wilt utterly.

Perkins grew angry beyond the power of coherent speech, and he spluttered vigorously as he tried to talk.

"What, what, what? The audacity—the infamy—Hang it! what do you mean by this work! I'll have you horsewhipped!"

"Take et easy, Mr. Man!" advised the boy. "Add a hundred pounds ter yer weight an' you'd be in danger o' appleplexy ef you got so hot under the breast-plate."

"I'll summon the clerk!—I'll have you flung out!—"

"Curb your anger," commanded he who held the paper.

"No! I will thrash you—"

Perkins started forward.

"Keep off!" was the cool warning.

Dickey Bond plucked at his superior's sleeve.

"Thunder an' misery! it's a detective!" he gasped.

Perkins stopped short.

"What's that?" he cried.

"Et is Joe Randall, the detective, an' that kid with him is Skimmer Nichols!"

"You've called the turn, Dickey!" cheerfully assented Skimmer, "an' now you can vacate these premises."

Perkins stood dumfounded. Now that he had the evidence of his companion his own eyes did the rest; the detective was no stranger to him, and he knew he was in for a most unpleasant encounter.

"Well?" questioned Randall.

"Well, I'll trouble you for that paper," replied Perkins, rallying.

"Why?"

"It is mine."

"I have heard all of your talk with this tough—"

Perkins turned hotly on Dickey.

"You have betrayed me!" he cried.

"No," answered the detective. "I'll be frank enough to clear him. All this is purely my own work. I've been on the trail for some time, and now I have run the game down. More, I have these papers, and Oliver Graydon will soon be a free man in respect to law."

"The papers are forged."

"A judge and jury shall pass on that question."

"You have no right to them—"

"I shall keep them."

Perkins yielded to his passion and moved forward.

"Give them up or—"

"Keep off!"

Randall threw himself partly into a position of defense, and the muscle he displayed was too much for Perkins's desires in one line. He had a trump card left—he drew a revolver quickly.

"We will see—"

Randall made a quick spring, and the weapon was wrested away in a twinkling.

"Again you lose the try for advantage," coolly remarked the detective.

Dickey Bond had not been less disappointed by the turn of events than was his superior. He had relied on the papers to fill his pocket, and the scheme was going wrong. Dickey knew a scheme worth two of Perkins's—he was well acquainted with many of the tramps who made use of the so-called hotel, and he knew their hatred of law and of officers.

He began a bellowing call which had not much distinctness, but its results were sure and quick. Sounds were heard in the building as if men were moving rapidly, and Skimmer turned a look on the detective which was not free from worry.

"The wolves gather when there is howlin'" reminded the boy.

Randall flashed a rapid glance around.

"Do you know more than one way out?" he asked.

"No."

"Nor I."

"Must we face them all?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE RAGGED CROWD MAKE TROUBLE.

PERKINS CROSBY and Dickey Bond had been very interested in their discussion—so much interested, in fact, that they had failed to pay any heed to anything else. When the paper was snatched from the vagabond's grasp they leaped up in consternation.

"So it looks. Here they come!" Feet pattered in the hall, and the door was flung open. The seedy band of nondescripts rushed in, wild eyed and eager. Skimmer had well compared them to wolves, for such they seemed to be, and all athirst for mischief.

Randall saw at once that there was a sort of freemasonry among them, and he braced himself for the inevitable.

"What is it?" demanded a big fellow who led the gang.

"A detective!" and Dickey Bond's finger indicated Randall.

A momentary hush fell over the party. Some of the rare specimens who put up at the "hotel" simply ranked as vagabonds, but they had not been the ones who rallied at Dickey's call. Those who had come were men to whom the sight of an officer was like a red flag to a vicious bull.

Randall did not let the others do all the talking.

"The last statement is correct," he calmly admitted; "I am a detective. Don't let the fact worry you; I am not here to look you up. I have nothing to do with you, and I care nothing about you."

"Me, too!" muttered Skimmer.

"Rest easy," pursued Randall. "I will not arrest you. It is only with this well-dressed person I have to deal."

The big leader had glanced at Dickey, and he had his cue.

"Wal, we hev somethin' ter do with you, old man!" he declared. "No detective can't go snoopin' around here. See?"

"What do you care as long as I don't trouble you or any of your friends?"

"We won't have the purity of our home soiled," put in Dickey. "Will we, Muggo?"

"That we won't," agreed the big leader.

"We ain't no use for detectives, have we?"

There was an echo from the rest of the party, and Randall assumed a new air.

"I will not dally with you longer," he asserted. "I have no bone to pick with you, and I do not intend to molest you, if you let me alone. Now, make way while I leave here."

"Five dollars to the man who gets those papers away from him!" cried Perkins Crosby.

A roar rose from the tramps. Five dollars meant a good deal of money to them, and they were eager to get it.

"At him!" ordered Muggo.

The party surged forward, but, just then, there was a new-comer on the scene. It was the clerk of the "hotel," looking frightened and pale.

"Stop it!" he implored. "You will have the police down on us."

"Shoot the police!"

"Men, don't be foolish. You have a good home here. Don't lose it and ruin us all by having a row. Don't the police always go against us? Of course they do; don't have any row in the hotel."

Cries of derision rose from the wild band, and, as their leader again gave the word, they surged forward. This time there was no check to their assault, and Randall saw that he must meet the attack. His revolver was where he could get it readily, but he was reluctant to use it, if this could be avoided. Instead, he proceeded to meet them as a well-versed man may under any condition.

With the cleanest blow imaginable he knocked Muggo over like a ten-pin, and then he was mixed up with the whole party. He struck out lustily, and rarely in vain, but he received as many blows as he gave.

Presently a strong hand seized him by the throat, but just then it came to pass that Skimmer's head took the fellow in the stomach, and he toppled over heavily.

"Wade in, Hannah!" cried the irrepressible boy. "Git all the fun you can while you're livin'. Shake out another kink!"

Perkins Crosby was moving about restlessly. It was far from a part of his practice to fight, so he did not try it now, but his mind was on the precious paper.

Was it possible to get it during the melee?

He edged in among the combatants, and began to work his hand toward Randall's pocket. Twice he was forced away from his prey, and he received all the misspent blows

of both parties, it seemed, but he took the bumps and bruises with all possible equanimity.

"The paper!" he thought. "I must have that!"

Randall was hard beset, and with so many men clinging to him he could not think of anything else. There was hope for Perkins, and he persevered.

Luck finally favored him, and he managed to slide his hand into the pocket. He touched the precious paper.

"I have it!" he exclaimed, aloud.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FATE OF THE PAPER.

PERKINS CROSBY's hopes did, indeed, seem well grounded, but he came to grief in the moment of his high aspirations, and the object of his downfall was nothing less than a foot, which took him under the chin and knocked him several yards away.

Whether it was the result of accident or design he did not know, but the blow was a severe one, and he lay gasping for some time before summoning enough resolution to re-enter the scene of disturbance.

Finally he rose. The fight was still on, but even he could see it was near an end. Randall, Skimmer and the hotel clerk were ranged against the rest of the party, and their defense was excellent, but they were so much outnumbered that they were losing strength rapidly.

"Wade in!" shouted Dickey Bond, cheerfully. "We will have detective hash fer our breakfast in the mornin'! Go in, my hummers!"

"The paper!" again muttered Perkins. "I'll make another try."

He pushed his way into the mass of men, heedless of blows which bruised and disfigured his face.

It was about five minutes later that a man came rushing into the room with a wild look on his face.

"Cheese it!" he exclaimed. "Perleeece!"

He was one of the frequenters of the house, and his word went for all things. The result was amazing. One moment there were fighting men all around; the next, the lodgers faded away like dew.

Joseph Randall and the hotel clerk were the only persons present.

"Police!" gasped the clerk. "This means ruin!"

He followed quickly after the lodgers, and then the detective had it all to himself. Instinctively, he first of all ran his hand into the pocket where the precious paper had been.

The pocket was empty!

"By Jove!" he cried, "the taker shall give it up!"

His first impression was that one of the lodgers had it, but on the way down he had time to think. The mysterious absence of Perkins Crosby, at the time the alarm was sounded, must mean something.

"He has it!" thought the detective. "Where has he gone? Have I done so much, and fought so much, only to lose it now? No, no; not so; I will have it back."

When he reached the common room the lethargy there was surprising. The clerk was yawning behind the desk, and the lodgers seemed to slumber on the benches. A more peaceful scene it would have been hard to find. Randall hastened toward the clerk.

"Where is Perkins Crosby?" he asked, sharply.

"I don't know, sir," answered the clerk.

"He is in hiding somewhere."

"If he is, out he goes. He has made too much mischief here to please me. But the police—they don't seem to come."

The clerk lowered his voice to a whisper and glanced nervously toward the door.

"Plainly," replied the detective, "it was a false alarm."

"Why the world was it done?"

"Jest fer biz, boss."

Plainly, it was the voice of Skimmer Nichols that uttered this speech, and Randall, who had wholly forgotten the boy, turned quickly.

"Skimmer, do you know where Perkins Crosby went?"

"Didn't watch him, after he an' me had our scrap."

"Your scrap?"

"Yes. One round; Marcuss o' Queensbury rules. Time called with me hammerin' Perk silly. I got it, too."

"Got what?"

"The pape."

"Do you mean—"

"Precipitate yer eye at that," coolly replied Skimmer, showing a well-remembered document. "Perk swiped it from you—"

"And you rescued it?"

"I did so."

"How?"

"Foller'd him down the stairs. He an' me had a brush, but I was too many guns fer him, an' I, got it away. Hero she be, boss."

Randall glanced hastily at the paper.

"It is all right. Skimmer, you are a brick."

"I know it," agreed Skimmer, not too modestly.

"Where is Perkins?"

"Skipped!"

"Let him go. It was this paper, not him, I desired."

"Say," added the boy, with a grin, "you ain't seen them perleeece, have you?"

"No. Who raised the alarm?"

"One o' the lodgers. Et cost me a dollar ter git him ter do it."

"Do you mean—"

"I mean that I thought that was the only way ter do it. Ef I hollered perleeece the gang wouldn't swaller the bait, but with the yell comin' from one o' their own innocents, et would be dif. I see that, so I hired his nibs ter holler. Didn't he do it prime!"

"My boy, you have a long head back of your eyebrows. I won't forget this favor. I will pay what it cost you, and a good bit more."

"I never refuse contributions. Be you ready ter go?"

"Yes. Come!"

This conversation had been carried on in such a tone that the inmates of the place had heard nothing, and the clerk, equally in the dark, breathed a sigh of relief when he saw them go out. A few yards from the outer door Randall paused.

"Which way do you go, Skimmer?"

"Why not keep with you?"

"I certainly would not rebuff you, but I am going home."

"Want ter study that pape?"

"Yes."

"Do et well," advised Skimmer, with a grin. "Et has cost us a good bit o' harrerin' trouble, an' some few square yards o' cuticle. I hope it will pay its keep."

"We shall be well rewarded, if it is all that is claimed for it. Yes, if it is so, you shall have more cash than you have had for many a day."

"Brayvol! Here's hopin' it will pan out rich."

Joseph hoped so, too, and he was thinking what a rich find it would be if, while other officers were chasing Oliver Graydon all over the United States, he could prove that Graydon was innocent of the crime for which he had been imprisoned.

"It would be a rich triumph for me, and it would be pleasant for him to be restored to honest citizenship," thought the detective.

"Crickey!" suddenly exclaimed Skimmer.

"What?"

"Look yender!"

"I fail to see whom you refer to."

"Do you see the two women? One is young an' fair ter look upon, an' the other is older and feeble o' limb, an' she is blind as you kin make them. That is Rachel, a friend o' mine, an' her mother. They are out on an errand o' some sort—they are huntin' fer a loved one, they say; though they won't tell who or why. I vow, it's a sight that works powerful on my feelin's!"

The case was even more pathetic than Skimmer suspected. Keeping their business to themselves, because they dared not make it known to anybody, Rachel and her mother were daily and nightly seeking for the lost husband and father.

The streets of New York were getting to know them well. Passers paused to look at the sweet-faced, sad-looking women whenever they went, the one so young and strong; the other so helpless in her blindness.

Now, they were alone on the Bowery, and Rachel's heart sunk as she noticed the character of those she saw by the way, but her devotion to her lost father kept her up.

Patiently, persistently, and led by the noblest feelings of the human kind, they continued the search they were so poorly fitted to conduct. Rachel knew the last fact, but she did not lose her resolution. It was one of the many pathetic scenes which the streets of the wide-stretching metropolis daily witnessed.

"It ain't safe for them," murmured Skinner. "They ain't no more fit ter go around so than babies would be."

"Their faces appeal to me strongly," replied Joseph.

"Of course they do. You are a detective, but you hev seller-feelin's, an' a kind spot in yer anatomy. Say, but look there!"

"To what?"

"The sport! He's follerin' of them."

"Ha! It is Henry Kneeland."

"Right you be! That mean skunk has fell in love with Rachel. Hub! she had better have a snake fancy her. Boss, the critter will do them harm."

"No!"

Randall spoke with decision, and then he walked swiftly after the sport, with Skinner at his heels.

Kneeland was out in all his glory. He aspired to be a well-dressed man, and, among his peculiar fraternity, he probably ranked as such. There was a good deal of money in his clothes, and he liked to air them on the street, but he was by far too flashy to make a good picture, if he but knew it.

Wearing a tall hat, and swinging a cane, he was striding along the Bowery with a killing air when a hand touched him on the shoulder.

He looked around, and then grew angry.

"What do you want?" he demanded, sourly.

"Stop here, Kneeland," coolly directed Randall.

"My business is elsewhere, and you can go to thunder. I shall go elsewhere."

"Not yet. Kneeland, don't you know me? You ought to. My name is Randall; my calling is that of a detective. You will let those women alone. Understand?"

The sport nearly collapsed. He had courage enough for an emergency, but this case was not one of that sort.

"I am doing no harm," he remonstrated.

"You were following those women."

"No, no! I assure you—"

"Don't! Your word is not good for anything."

Kneeland flushed.

"You are hard on me, Randall."

"Oh! you recognize me now?"

"Yes."

"Then you will remember me as one who knows your ways well. Stay right here, Henry, and avoid trouble."

The sport sent a regretful look after Rachel and her mother, and then relapsed into inaction. He was afraid of the power of the law as vested in Randall, and he gave up his hopes for the time.

"When they are fully gone," pursued Randall, "you can go free. Don't let me see you molesting them again, or you will get hurt. It is contemptible business. Be wise; let them alone!"

CHAPTER XXII.

NEW DANGER.

THE next day Oliver Graydon was in his private room. He was lying down, and was more fit to be in bed than out of it. The suspense and worry were telling on him, and he felt unnerved wholly.

Naturally, he was a man of strong nature, and he had endured his own dangers with considerable fortitude, but since the meeting with his wife and daughter in the Park he had weakened measurably.

Not knowing what their dangers might be he imagined the worst, and he was powerless to help them. He had considered every device by which he could aid them, and had found no way.

He could not go out personally to search for them, and he dared not engage any one else to do it. Even if he knew where they were he could not hire a helper to call on them, for it would connect him with the

wife and daughter of the escaped convict, and such a thing would lead to his own downfall, he believed.

He was well aware that they would rather he would remain inactive than to do that which would return him to Sing Sing. To Sing Sing? No; worse was in store for him if he was found.

He remembered what he had done to Walker Crosby.

"That act makes me a fugitive forever," he thought. "Even if I were proved innocent of the crime for which I was first imprisoned, I could not go among my fellowmen. The blood of Walker Crosby is on my hands, and I can accept no proof of innocence of other things."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come!" he directed.

Mrs. Trull entered.

Graydon was beginning to get acquainted with the lady who claimed to be his wife, and he was not more favorably disposed toward her than at the start. She was, for one thing, a person of very variable temper, with a habit of "blowing everybody up," as Bildad expressed it, one moment, and following her outburst of temper with an unctuous show of good humor which was positively depressing in a woman so little gifted with attractive qualities.

On the present occasion she was good humored, and she first sunk into a chair and then looked sweetly at Graydon.

"How is my dear husband, to-day?" she inquired.

Graydon moved uneasily. He did not want her to make love to him.

"I'm well," he ungraciously replied.

"Been deep in your books, haven't you?"

Graydon had not yet assumed Montgomery Call's role fully enough to turn book-worm, but he made an affirmative reply.

"I think you are injuring yourself with so much study, Simcon," pursued the wife.

"Not at all; not at all."

"You do not look well."

"It is biliousness."

"Ah! I fear it is too much study."

"Merely my liver, madam," curtly declared Graydon.

"Stubborn man!" coquettishly persisted Mrs. Trull. "It is not your liver. Love tells me that."

Graydon would have been overwhelmed by the ridiculousness of the occasion if he had been less seriously placed. As it was, he was disgusted and anxious to drop the subject. However, he felt that Mrs. Trull had something on her mind, and he waited to hear what it was. He had not long to wait.

"Simeon," seriously added Susanna, presently, "I have done something looking forward to your happiness."

"Have you? What?"

"I have invited your brother Stansbury here."

Graydon suddenly straightened up, all on the alert. He had been given to understand that Montgomery Call had been without near relatives. Possibly, he was to hear nothing to invalidate that supposition, but it struck him at once that it was to be otherwise.

"What?" he cried.

"Stansbury Call is coming here."

"Woman, what do you mean?"

"Simply that I have invited your brother to visit us," replied Mrs. Trull with easy composure.

Graydon could have thrown the meddlesome woman out of the house with the greatest good will. All along he had been scheming to keep out of sight of Montgomery Call's friends, so that they would not discover that a spurious Montgomery had stepped into the shoes of the real owner of the name, and now—

Discovery stared him in the face.

"Woman, what have you done?" he cried.

"Who is—"

He was about to demand to know who Stansbury Call was, but he checked himself just in time. A man was supposed to know his own brother, and it would not do to admit that he did not. Susanna was amiably blind to the drift of the interrupted question.

"Who is responsible for this?" she sweetly interrupted. "I am, Simeon; I am. I learned from a servant of the unfortunate breach between you and Stansbury, and, as I

was told that it was you who were in the wrong, at the start, I said to myself that I would bring your brother to forgive you. I went to him; I pleaded for you, and you are forgiven. More, he will be here, to-morrow, to see you and grasp your hand as of yore when you were all in all to each other."

Mrs. Trull looked supremely satisfied, but Graydon wiped the perspiration from his forehead. What mischief would not this stupid woman do?

Impetuously he broke forth:

"How dared you do this?"

"Dared, Simeon?"

"Yes, dared."

"I am your wife."

"You are a fool!" hotly declared the harassed man.

"What?" gasped Mrs. Trull.

"A blind fool!" thundered Graydon.

"Oh, Simeon!"

"How dared you meddle with my business? How did you know I wanted you to do this? What business had you to think for me, or act for me?"

"But, I thought—"

"You had no business to think!"

Susanna rose in majestic anger.

"Simeon Trull, you have said quite enough. You are taking to your old ways, and I will not endure it. Am I—I to be domineered over like this? No, I surely am not, and if this sort of thing continues I will apply to the police for protection from your fury."

She had struck the one chord that would avail her against Graydon—she mentioned the police, and it was quite enough to make him calm down. He could not risk having them in.

"If you don't want me to be angry," he replied, "why did you do this absurd thing?"

"I wanted you to be reconciled to your brother."

"Do I want it?"

"It is for your good."

"Nonsense!"

"But it is."

"Be that as it may, I won't see him. If I have quarreled with him, I will stay so. I will not see him."

"But he is coming to-morrow—"

"He shall not cross this threshold; he shall not enter my doors."

"Implacable man!" sighed Susanna.

Graydon dared not say too much. He was not sure that this alleged brother was a genuine article, and he might make difficulty for himself by over-doing his opposition.

"I shall give orders that the servants do not admit him."

"He may insist."

Graydon wavered before the possibility. There was no knowing how tenacious the brother might be, if he had set out to be reconciled. It was one more danger heaped upon the impostor. Susanna, in her blundering way, seemed determined to make trouble for him. He was liable to have a host of family relatives shaken down upon him yet, and every one who came made his danger greater.

Mrs. Trull appeared worried by her failure, and she tried to speak on more pleasant topics.

"Our dear Hope is entertaining Mr. Joseph Randall," she remarked, changing the subject.

"Oh! is she?"

Graydon spoke sourly. It was not agreeable to learn that the detective was in the house, but he dared not say anything against it.

"Yes. He seems quite taken with Hope, and I think it would be a good match for her, don't you?"

Graydon did not commit himself on this important point fully, and his reticence encouraged Mrs. Trull to prattle on in her peculiar way, weaving garlands for the brow of her daughter. When she finally went out Graydon sent a black look after her.

"So a brother of the real Montgomery Call will come to-morrow?" he muttered. "Well, he will find the doors closed against him, if I live until then. Why, if that man gets into the house I am ruined. He will know I am not Montgomery Call, and then—"

A shiver followed, and the sentence was not finished.

Again there was a knock at the door, and when Graydon replied, Joseph Randall walked in.

"Excuse me," he spoke, "but are you open to important business?"

Graydon rose, startled. What was coming?

CHAPTER XXIII.

TOO LATE FOR VINDICATION.

IT was well that the light was not strong in the room, or Graydon's expression might have set Randall to thinking. As it was, the escaped convict's suspense was soon over. The detective followed up his remark with a light laugh, and then added:

"Mr. Call, I have several times been indebted to you for good [cigars]. Will you allow me to offer you one of mine, now?—not necessarily as an exhibit of merit, but as a proof of good will."

Graydon breathed a sigh of relief as he realized that Randall had been joking when he was so grave at the start. He liked the younger man, detective though he was, and they sat down to talk together. The liking was not all on one side; the detective had found Graydon an agreeable companion, and, as the supposed father of Hope, he was one worth impressing favorably.

Consequently, Joseph warmed out a good deal, and conversation grew animated on his part.

As the fumes of the cigar added to his good nature he did what he rarely did in professional work—indulged in confidence.

"Mr. Call," he finally broke forth, "you will remember that I mentioned Graydon, the convict, to you?"

The older man's heart seemed to get out of order at once; it took on a peculiar order of beating.

"Yes," he faintly admitted.

"I told you I was hunting him."

"Yes."

"I hope to get him soon."

"You—you—Have you a clue?"

"Yes."

Randall looked his host in the face seriously, and Graydon was seized with a sudden impulse to put out his hands and exclaim:

"Put on the handcuffs!"

He was positive that arrest was at hand, but managed to resist the inclination to meet it half-way. He did not make any break, but waited in silence for the next act in the drama.

Randall took out his cigar, surveyed the gray of its tip with an air of satisfaction, and waited—thereby keeping Graydon in suspense. Finally he added, quietly:

"I say I have a clue. Maybe I should say that I hope I have, but, if so, it is exceedingly faint. Really, I rely little on it. Still, I am more than ever eager to find Graydon. Do you know why?"

"No."

"I am going to prove him innocent."

"What?"

"I have positive proof that he was guiltless of the crime for which he went to Sing Sing. Do you remember his case at all?"

"Well, a little," replied the older man, hesitatingly.

"He was president of a Western land and improvement company, and was arrested, convicted and imprisoned under charge of having embezzled from the concern. He always protested his innocence. Now, I can prove positively that he was innocent, and when he is found I will prove it."

Graydon was breathing heavily.

"How?" he asked, in a low voice.

"By producing documentary evidence that he was the victim of a plot to ruin him. He had an enemy, and this enemy schemed successfully to have Graydon proved guilty. Of course it took cunning work, and he was equal to it."

"Who was this man?"

"His name was Walker Crosby."

"Will your documentary evidence be enough to prove it?"

"I have more. The plotter had to have help. I have seen his tool—a man named Riesdecker—and he will, to save his own neck, swear to all the facts. Only let me see

Oliver Graydon and I will prove his innocence."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Where is Walker Crosby now?" and the escaped convict leaned forward in his anxiety as he awaited the reply.

"I don't know."

"Have you tried to find him?"

"Yes. Even his best friends, however, do not know where he is. He was to be in New York on the 18th instant, but he did not come."

Graydon drew a gasping breath. It was on the 17th instant that he had fought with Walker Crosby by the Hudson River. No wonder he had not come.

"I feel elated over this," pursued Randall. "Of course Graydon will be captured sooner or later. When he is, and my fellow-detectives are exulting over their rich find, I will step in and blast their hopes. Oliver Graydon will go free. He is innocent, and I will prove it to the world."

"Suppose your proof comes too late?" suggested the listener, gripping the arms of his chair.

"How can it? Perhaps you mean he may be killed in being retaken."

"I hardly know."

"It will not be too late. I will prove him innocent."

The evening was not warm, but the older man took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his brow. He was in mental torment then. Far better than Joseph Randall he knew certain facts, and he could not subscribe to the assertion that the vindication would come in time.

"Too late, too late!" was the silent cry of his stricken heart.

Randall smoked on in calm contentment, oblivious of all around him. He was not then a detective, compelled to be on the alert. He liked his host, and he liked, for the once, to sink his professional identity and be simply a man, privileged to talk when it could do no harm.

"Graydon was a hardly used man," he pursued. "I am told that his reputation was very high in his old home, and he had a fine family. It is said that his wife and daughter are models of true womanliness. If that is so, think how they have suffered!"

"Ah!"

The listener was doing his best to retain self-control. It was a hard task.

"It will be a most happy day for them when they can see their loved one proved innocent," the detective went on. "Dark, indeed, has been their past since he went to prison. Think of their shame, their anxiety, their mental distress—perhaps their physical suffering—"

Oliver Graydon leaped to his feet.

"No more!" he cried, wildly.

Randall gazed in surprise.

"I don't understand," he responded.

Graydon made a great effort to govern himself. His nerves had given way under the strain, but when he had once broken loose he remembered his situation again, and strove to undo his error. He was like one who seeks to raise a mountain by his own unaided efforts—it seemed as if a gigantic load was resting upon him, and he could not stir it.

"I—I—Why, hang it, man, you are too confounded dramatic for everyday life. You upset a fellow with your realism. Remember that I am somewhat of an invalid. Don't be so violent—or else go on the stage. Ha, ha!"

It was a very poor effort, and the laugh with which he ended lacked the first elements of mirth, but Joseph Randall was not then in a critical mood. He laughed lightly.

"Pardon me, Mr. Call; I did not intend to be dramatic. Possibly I was, for I feel deeply for poor Oliver Graydon—"

"So do I!" shot from the listener's lips.

"And his wife and child, too."

"Yes, yes; and for them. I am with you in that. You and I are of the same mind. Give me your hand on it!"

The almost frenzied man grasped Randall's hand and shook it with fierce warmth. The iron nerve which had led him on so well in the past was gone. The detective had asserted that he could prove his innocence of embezzlement, and now, in the very hour of the assertion, he was confronted with the

dread fact that, come what might, he could not avail himself of the glad news.

He remembered how Walker Crosby had fallen in the river.

No wonder he was distracted; he saw paradise and could not gain it.

Randall was puzzled by this new outbreak, but he accepted what appeared to be the most reasonable explanation—that which his companion had himself given.

"I remember," thought the detective, "that he was said to have met with an accident that nearly took his life. His nerves are all upset, and my choice of subject has so worked on his sympathies that he is not responsible."

Believing this, Randall made a few more harmless remarks, and then changed the subject skillfully.

His cigar was burned to the end, and he did not long delay. Bidding his host good-day he went his way. Graydon heard the outer door close, and then he flung himself upon a couch.

"Lost, lost, lost!" he panted.

He tore at his neck almost like a wild animal, and his face was convulsed with agony. For many minutes he fought with his feelings, and then the violence of his passions passed.

"Lost!" he repeated, in a piteous tone. "I could go back to Mary and Rachel; I could return to the old life; I could be a man again; but—ah! I murdered Walker Crosby, and there is no hope now. My sin has found me out. Nothing can excuse a man in taking human life, and though Crosby deserved it, I am the heaviest sufferer. He lost life; I lose far more than that!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

RIVER THIEVES.

RODNEY PROCTOR and Joseph Randall sat in the former's room, passing an idle hour away. Conversation had been on trivial subjects, but the detective broke a lull by inquiring:

"How prosper your two friends, the blind lady and her daughter?"

"Joe," answered Proctor, "I am worried about them."

"Why?"

"They are keeping up their quest for their missing friend—whatever it may be—in all parts of the city, and they are as ill-fitted for it as babes in the wood."

"Do you still remain ignorant of their mission to New York?"

"Wholly. Mrs. Forrest and her daughter are friendly with me, and seem to like to see me, but they tell nothing. Now, you know my situation. I am at leisure, and very willing to help them, and I have the knowledge of New York necessary to do it with system. On the other hand, they know nothing of city life, and Mrs. Forrest is pitifully helpless in her blindness. Miss Rachel is a brainy girl, but she is not a city girl. She is out of her element here."

"You assume that they are hunting a missing man?"

"I am next to sure of it."

"Do you think him a criminal, or simply unfortunate?"

Proctor hesitated.

"Unfortunate, of course," he then answered.

"Why, then, should they refuse to confide in you?" Randall asked.

"I don't know."

"They call their name Forrest. Do you think it their real name?"

"I would not dare to say yes."

The detective meditated, and then added, smiling:

"You do not seem to be fortunate with the ladies you rescue. Now, there was Miss Hope Trull, or Call, or whatever her name is. You saved her from the briny waters of the East River, yet you never go near her now."

"I called once after she was housed with Montgomery Call, and I have a standing invitation, but I see no reason for going further. But, Joe, you appear to fill my place," and Rodney smiled in turn.

"I was employed by Mrs. Trull and her daughter, and I keep my clients on the string. If anybody imagines I am interested in Miss Hope, they are mightily in error."

"Nonsense, Joel" banteringly replied the second man. "Your calls answer for themselves."

"Rod, do you know I have the presentiment that I may be needed there again. I know that Montgomery Call is not a happy man, and, in the absence of evidence to show other sorrows for him, I can't rid myself of the impression that Susanna Trull and her daughter are sinners, rather than sinned against."

"And that is why you have gone there?"

"It is. I have gone simply to watch the run of the machine. In doing this I have learned to like Mr. Call, and to dislike Susanna and her daughter."

"You play a deep game."

"Merely a waiting one. Perhaps something will come of it; perhaps nothing. Mr. Call is a very peculiar man, and one not easy to draw into confidence."

"You have a good many irons in the fire. Are you still sure that you have proof that Oliver Graydon is innocent of the charges laid to his door?"

"Positive."

"I do not understand how you got track of that paper, or the papers which established his innocence."

"By listening to talk between Perkins' Crosby and Henry Kneeland, I learned that Kneeland claimed to have proof of Graydon's innocence. He tried to bleed Perkins, but, in the meanwhile, Dickey Bond, who was a confederate of Kneeland in sundry other crooked work, got onto the plot. He stole the papers from Kneeland and offered to sell them to Perkins."

"And you balked the plan?"

"Yes. When Perkins went to the lodging-house, at Dickey's invitation, I was there, too, and I secured the papers."

"Kneeland and Dickey are both out, now, then?"

"Yes. All I want now, is to find Graydon. Then I will clear him."

"Where do you think he is?"

"I don't know."

"The rumors that he has been seen twice in Central Park—"

"Probably moonshine."

"He has been seen, also, according to rumor, all over several different States."

"Let a man be a fugitive and all the officers in Christendom are sure to see him now and then. Rod, what are you going to do this evening?"

"I was thinking of going out on the East River for a row."

"Take me!"

"Will you go?"

"Yes. I want an evening off, and it will be a little relaxation to have the spin on the noble river."

"Come, then."

They went. When the boat-house was reached Rodney got out a boat and pulled out with the detective as passenger. The night was cloudy, and the faint moon that would otherwise have shone, was seen only at intervals.

Rodney rowed on with the clean stroke of the practiced oarsman.

"Not much stir on the stream to-night," remarked Randall.

"Very little."

It was true, and they had an uneventful row up the river for an hour. Then they turned back. They were nearing the pier when another boat appeared not far away. The two passed each other. As they drifted apart, the detective looked quickly at his companion.

"What do you make of it?"

"I was wondering if you would see anything peculiar."

"Do you?"

"You are the professional. Tell your own story."

"I noticed," added Randall, "that they carried some sort of freight, well covered up."

"True."

River-thieves are always doing business about New York. The public hears of it but infrequently, for it is poor policy to publish it to all the world, and the gangs go on forever. Rodney, can you follow them without exciting suspicion?"

"I can try."

"Do so."

Proctor began to use his oars with renew-

ed skill. He could not make their own craft invisible, and a moving boat was an object to be seen if a viewer was near enough, but there was a natural and an unnatural way to row. He now tried to follow the strangers without being suspected in this intention.

If this attempt was a failure neither he nor Randall saw anything to indicate it, and the pursuit went on smoothly. In due time the journey ended. The foremost craft put into a dock and disappeared. Randall spoke in a low tone.

"Cease rowing!"

Rodney obeyed and the boat was allowed to drift.

"Are you open to an adventure?" asked the detective.

"With professional work in view?"

"Yes."

"I am with you."

"This dock," pursued Randall, thoughtfully, "is one which has been suspected before. I am almost sure that those fellows were thieves, and that the stuff they carried came from some warehouse they had robbed to-night. I want to prove it. Will you land then accompany me on an exploring trip?"

"Willingly."

They put into the dock mentioned and had no trouble in stowing their boat away. Then they walked toward the dock into which the other party had gone.

It was Randall's theory that they would find, or rather, that if they were successful, they would find a den under the pier, but when they investigated they formed a different theory. A faint light showed in a building on the pier.

"That must be supposed to be the quarters of the watchman," mused the detective, aloud, "but it may not be so innocent. These men cannot have gone out of sight in a flash, and as there is nothing visible to tell of an excavation under the pier, I think we may well look to the building."

They went near it, but to do the desired work was not so easy. The means were finally settled upon. Both were young and active, and when they had studied the formation of the building, they set out to climb up to a second-story window.

It was a difficult task. Probably the owners of the edifice considered it impossible; if so, that was why the way was open. Randall and Rodney persevered, and, after a good deal of hanging between earth and sky, they swung themselves into the window.

"A fair sample of the recklessness of people along the river. They leave the way clear for law-breakers, and then wonder why they succeed in doing robbery. Follow me!"

The explorers crept along in the dark for awhile, and then the leader suddenly grasped Proctor's arm.

"Hush!"

Rodney looked ahead and had no trouble in understanding the meaning of the caution. Beyond them was a lighted room, with several men standing in a group. Close to them was a pile of merchandise, and all was in condition which told that it had come in the boat.

"A gang of river thieves," whispered Randall, "with the watchman of this building as an ally. No wonder they succeed."

"They talk earnestly."

"Let me get closer and see what they speak about."

"It is risky."

"So it is, for, if we are discovered, they will shoot us if they can. Observe their faces! It is a hard gang, and murder and they are not strangers, I'll wager something. If we are seen, look out for fun. Are you armed?"

"No."

"Take this revolver. I have another."

The detective passed the weapon over, and then began his slow advance along the cover of a pile of boxes used in the legitimate trade of the company. He finally succeeded in getting to the desired point. He paused to listen. Conversation was going on.

"We must hear from headquarters," declared one man, decidedly. "Since the boss has not come to us, we must go to him."

"It's against his orders."

"I don't care. We want an explanation.

We have gone on in the dark for some time; now we want to know what ails Montgomery Call. He must keep up his confection, or pull out as our captain."

CHAPTER XXV.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

DETECTIVE RANDALL made a stir in his ambush. If the words he had heard were to be taken as they seemed to mean, there was good reason why he should feel surprised.

"The captain has always said we were to keep away from his house," persisted the man who had spoken against the plan.

"Then why hasn't he attended to business? For some time past we have sent letters to his private address, and not a word have we heard in reply."

"He may be sick."

"I have secretly passed his house, and I saw him standing at the window, looking well and hearty."

"He must have got the letters we sent him," put in a third man.

"That is what makes me suspicious. I have investigated, and I find he has not got them. He has not been near his private address in over two weeks, and all our letters are held there."

"Queer!"

"He must know as well as we do that such letters are dangerous things to have lying uncalled for—"

"Dangerous to him, as well as to us."

"Just so. See the situation. Don't you all think I had better call on the captain and see what is wrong?"

There was a general affirmative chorus, but the remonstrator again reminded:

"It's always been his orders that we should not go near the house."

"You make me tired!" snapped the chief spokesman. "Is Montgomery Call any better than the rest of us, just because he is rich? It was he who organized this band. He got us together, and nearly all our orders have come from him. He has used his knowledge of rich men to plot rich hauls, and we have worked two years under his leadership. When Montgomery Call said 'Come!' we came; when he said 'Go!' we went. He has been absolute master, and we have gladly let him do it, because we recognized the fact that he was a man of brains. We have grown richer under his lead—"

"And so has he."

"Just so. River thieves have prospered, and Montgomery Call has taken the lion's share of the plunder."

"Maybe he now wants to pull out, since we discovered that our mysterious leader was, really, Mr. Call."

"He would not do it this way; he would not leave tell-tale letters at the private address. When we accidentally learned that our leader was Montgomery Call, I talked with him. He was very frank; he admitted that he was Mr. Call, and said he knew he could trust the boys."

"Something is very wrong with Call," broke in a man who had previously been silent. "As you say, all the present run of events is against his own safety. He would not pull out thus. Boys, something strange is wrong with Montgomery Call!"

"You may be right."

"I am; I feel sure of it."

"Then," added the chief speaker, "isn't it best that I go to him and learn what is up?"

"It may be so."

"It is so," asserted another speaker. "We don't want to be in the dark any longer. If there is a screw loose somewhere we are likely to all be gobbed by the police. I say, interview Captain Call right off, an' let him explain why he has so suddenly ceased to be heard from."

"Good!" was the chorus.

"Who shall go?" inquired the chief spokesman.

"You."

"Not I. The police know me so well it would not do for them to see me entering Call's house."

"I nominate Tommy Carroll."

There was a fresh chorus in approval of this nomination, but Mr. Carroll looked at his clothes and modestly said he did not

think he would fill the bill; he was too ragged. All the members agreed to furnish what they could, and it was decided that Tommy should be fitted out and sent on the errand.

When this point was reached the band gave indications of scattering, and Joseph Randall moved away from his position. He joined Rodney and whispered:

"Come!"

"Silently they retreated, and, after a dangerous swing in mid-air, regained the pier. Even then the detective did not speak, and his companion finally broke the pause.

"Did you learn anything?"

"Rodney," answered Randall, "you could knock me down with a feather!"

"Why?"

Rapidly Randall explained all he had learned. Then there was another lull.

"This must be a base falsehood!" exclaimed Proctor, presently.

"Why?"

"Call's position in the world, his character, his habits—"

"As far as those things go, they count for nothing; I have been a detective long enough to disregard character and the like. Lightning often strikes in strange places. Drop the 'character' part. I am, however, simply dumfounded."

"I don't wonder."

"Montgomery Call the leader of river pirates?—whew!"

"It can't be."

"Remember the circumstances. Our gang of thieves were alone; they talked, not for effect, but for safety and out of pure business. If there is an error, they are themselves the ones deceived."

"That must be it; some designing knave has assumed Call's name."

"But the mysterious captain gave no name, and he was an unknown to his followers until they accidentally learned, they claim, just who he was."

"It is amazing."

"It is all of that."

"Montgomery Call has been represented as almost a hermit, and as a man who delighted in books above all things; and that such a quiet person, rich as he was, should turn river pirate, is past belief."

"Not so. Anxious as I am to see Call cleared, I combat the notion that the character he bears in the eyes of the world has anything to do with it. Men of all grades run to folly and crime; that's the lesson of the life I have led in detective harness."

"You are right. History gives us ample proof of all you say, and I am foolish to deny it. Still, I can't get over my surprise."

"It is harder for me to do so than for you, for I have talked with Call. He seemed to be a fine, honest man. Have you talked with him?"

"I have not even seen him. As you know, I have called there but once since you helped Mrs. Trull and her daughter into the house, and I did not see him then. I don't know that I ever set eyes on him."

"He looks something like the published pictures of Oliver Graydon, the escaped convict. Have you seen enough here?"

"Yes."

"Then let us go."

"Shall you bring the police here?"

"Not now. The gang does not know of our visit, and they will keep; I want time to think this over. I am sort of dumfounded to learn what we have in Mr. Montgomery Call."

They returned to the boat, entered and rowed away around the bend of the river. Straight back to the boat-house they went, and both were soon on land again and bound for home.

"How do you intend to deal with this new complication?" inquired Rodney, as they went.

"I wish to see Tommy Carroll make his visit to Call, and there will be no difficulty about seeing, I think. He is pretty sure to go to-morrow, and I will be on the watch. I can't be in the house, but I can judge by outside signs how he is received."

This was all that Rodney learned of his companion's intentions, and it was as much as Randall, himself, then knew of how he would proceed. He had been a guest in Montgomery Call's house, and he was pained

to find that duty required him to strike that man with the arm of law.

The detective left Rodney at the latter's house. Rodney entered alone. He found a note awaiting him, and when he opened it he read as follows:

"MR. PROCTOR:—If convenient to you, we should be pleased to see you to-morrow morning.

"RACHEL FORREST."

Rodney smiled slightly.

"They will see me, certainly."

When morning came he wended his way toward the boarding-house. The two ladies were awaiting him, and they did not long keep him ignorant of the cause of the summons.

"Mr. Proctor," began Rachel, "you have, in the past, expressed a willingness to help us."

"More," he replied; "I shall be glad to help you."

"Suppose we keep you in the dark, in a measure? Suppose we ask you to search for us, to find a certain man, but do not tell you his name?"

"How, then, can I find him?"

"As we are seeking to do—on the possibility that you may run upon him on the streets."

"But I do not even know how he looks."

"We will give you a portrait as a guide."

"That will not be the best of things to go by, but I feel too much interested in your search to say no to such a proposition. Mrs. Forrest's condition is such that any man who would refuse his help would be most unfeeling."

"Then you accept?"

"Am I to remain equally ignorant as to why you seek him, and what he is to you?"

"He is my husband!" cried the blind woman; "my poor, unfortunate husband!"

"I accept the trust without conditions!" declared Rodney, moved by her tone.

"May we impose conditions?" inquired Rachel, hesitatingly.

"What are they?"

"First, that you will not, under any condition, show the portrait we give you to any one."

"Granted!"

"Next, that you will not say anything to anybody that can injure our prospects. By that, I mean that you shall not explain that you are helping us, or speak of a missing man, or arouse curiosity by any means."

"All this I grant."

"You will be compelled to work, as we are doing, secretly and silently."

"And so I will."

"Here is the portrait."

Rachel's voice trembled as she spoke the last words. She passed a photograph over to Rodney. Mrs. Forrest leaned forward, bending her sightless eyes upon the young man. She seemed almost to cease breathing. It was a momentous period in their lives—these two devoted women. The great question with them was, would Rodney recognize the portrait from any reason?

He looked long and earnestly.

"I do not blame you," he finally remarked, "for wishing to locate a man who bears this face. It is a noble face."

"He was a noble man."

"Surely," added the visitor, "this man can have no secret that the whole world might not well know."

"Mr. Proctor," answered Rachel, "there is nothing more heartrending in this world than the agony which comes through ill-fortune."

"You are right, Miss Forrest. Let me not comment in set fashion on this picture, but briefly say that I like the face very much. Shall I keep this picture?"

"Yes; we have two."

"Am I to search where I think best? Can you add nothing to that?"

"Unfortunately, we cannot. Now, Mr. Proctor, this is a matter of vital importance to us. We have trusted you with much. We—we—"

Rachel broke down.

"I understand!" quickly replied Rodney. "Say no more. I will keep the picture, and, slight as the clue is, I hope I may be

able to help you. I will be silent to all, and I will search. I hope I may succeed."

"May Heaven grant it!" murmured the blind woman.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE IMPOSTOR HAS A VISITOR.

OLIVER GRAYDON rose from his chair and walked across the floor. At times he got so nervous that action of some sort was necessary. His life was merely one prolonged period of waiting for the crash which he felt sure must come. It was wearing in the extreme, and he was far from being the strong man he was once.

Mrs. Trull's latest scheme of inviting a brother of Montgomery Call to the house had failed simply because, when the brother came, Graydon had omitted to see him, refusing point-blank to allow him to pass the threshold of the outer door.

Stansbury Call had gone away in a rage. Whether he would be heard from again the impostor did not know, but Mrs. Trull had been given to understand that if she meddled more with her supposed husband's affairs she would be ejected from the house.

She was freshly angered, but Graydon hoped she would profit by the lesson.

The escaped convict was still walking the floor, on this occasion, when Bildad came with the announcement that a man wished to see Mr. Call. The visitor had given no name, but Graydon had acquired a sort of apathetic habit of recklessness by which he saw everybody, barring Stansbury Call, and he went down.

He found a rough-looking man who was most erratically dressed. He wore a tall hat which was several years out of date; a pair of trowsers which were some inches too short for him, and a dilapidated full-dress coat over a corduroy vest.

A more wonderfully habited man had rarely been seen except on the stage and in one's dreams.

Graydon thought he looked like a mixture of thief and assassin, but the visitor was not dangerous just then. Instead, he sat silent until Graydon closed the door, and then rose and made sundry gestures calling for silence, it seemed. He looked all around, as if fearful of being observed, and then softly whispered.

"Whist, whist!"

Graydon regarded him in profound amazement. He did not know what to make of such antics.

"Not a word!" exclaimed the man, anxiously.

"What in the world do you mean?" demanded the host.

"Whist, whist!"

The stranger peered behind the screen, and shoved the lace curtains out of the way. He seemed bent on finding a listener, or in proving there was none present. Graydon grew fascinated by a spectacle so singular, and could only stare mutely. He believed he had met a madman.

Finally the visitor bent his gaze again on Graydon and put his finger to his lips. Approaching closer, he then spoke in a husky whisper:

"The boys sent me!"

"The boys?" echoed Graydon.

"Yes."

"What boys?"

"Why, Crofter, Maginnis, Welch, Schmitt an' de rest. See?"

"No," replied Graydon.

"Dey wanted ter know why you hadn't been around."

"Around where?"

"To de nest. Now, don' speak above a whisper. I am fly; I am; an' nobody kin say I ain't. De boys selected me 'cause I wuz fly. See? De nest ain't cold, but de pigeons ain't seen de boss in de dove cote lately. See? We got scared about you, an' de boys, dey sent me. Now, be calm; don't be scared. Et has all been done on the dead quiet—see? Why, we wuz right careful not ter get you into dif. De boys allowed I must come dressed like a four hundred, an' dey rigged me out in dis suit. Say, ain't these swell?"

The stranger pulled his full-dress coat to one side, and surveyed his grotesquely-garbed figure with evident pride.

"What in the world do you mean?" repeated Graydon, sharply.

"Huh?"

"Who are you?"

"Huh?" repeated the man, looking dazed.

"What's your name?"

"Come, now; dat's a good one. Don't know know Tommy Carroll? But—oh! I ketch on; you's wary, you is. Dat's right; dat's right! But ain't et safe ter talk here?"

"You confounded idiot!" cried Graydon, losing prudence in his disgust and anger. "what do you mean, anyhow? Are you crazy or drunk?"

Tommy Carroll had another addition of bewilderment but the expression of his face suddenly changed.

"Oh! I see!" he cried. "You don't know me 'cause I hev these fine clothes on. I'll enlighten you. Did you ever hear o' some river lads who swipe de stuff, wid Monty Call as de cap'n? Did ye ever hear of the nest on de pier? Did you ever hear of the goods we raise wid you fer a planner? Hey? Ever hear of dat?"

Tommy chuckled with great amusement, and seemed to think he was perfectly clear.

"Never!" declared Graydon. "I never heard of you, nor do I know what all this wild talk means."

Tommy's face fell.

"Do you mean to say you ain't Cap Cinch?"

"I have never heard of such a ridiculous name."

Thus far Tommy had been mild as a May morning, but his mood suddenly changed. His coarse, brutal face grew ugly.

"See here, you!" he growled. "Ef you think you kin shake de band you'll get left powerful; you will. I'm a river thief, I am; an', by Judas! you are my cap'n! See?"

"Who do you take me to be?"

"Montgomery Call, who is knowed ter the river thieves as Cap Cinch!"

"You are looking me in the face. Do you really say that?"

"Yes, you dratted cur! Want ter go back on the band, do ye? Wal, you will find out—"

"Not quite so loud, please. Sit down, and let us talk this over. That is right! Now, tell me all about this man you claim."

"All a loss o' time, by geel but I am a man of system, an' ef you say so, so let it be. I'll do as you say now—later on, you will do as I say! Yes, you will—or git hurt, by geel!"

Tommy Carroll was no longer good natured. The ugly part of his nature at the front, and he scowled blackly on the man he supposed to be Montgomery Call. He sat down with an air as if he expected the soft cushion of the chair, to which he was wholly unused, to play him a prank. Then he put his regard on his host. His spirits had taken a woeful tumble. Gone was his pride in his gorgeous garments, and, believing that he was to be disowned by his leader, he was quick and terse of speech.

"I'm a river thief, I be; an' I'm one of a band. We was formed inter the band by a man who called hisself Captain Cinch. He never went with us on our raids, but jest planned fer us, an' we struck it rich on his advice."

Graydon began to see what was coming, and he saw, too, fresh trouble for himself. Tommy went on swiftly.

"For a year or so we never knowed who our leader was, an' then chance let us onto the truth. His name was Montgomery Call!"

"Who said so?" asked Graydon.

"He did—you did!"

"Well?"

"When we got inter the facts, Captain Cinch admitted his identity like a man. He wasn't a bit put out, but he cautioned us ter respect his secret, an' we jest did so. We still called him Captain Cinch, an' never worried him a bit. All went well until up-ards of two weeks ago."

Graydon drew a deep breath. It was then that Montgomery Call fell into the Hudson.

"Captain Clinch, he had a private letter-box by which he kep' up correspondence with us, an' letters flowed frequent. Up-ards of two weeks ago there was a fall off in the correspondence. We got no more letters from the captain, an' we found

he did not take his out no more. He didn't come to see us, neither, no more. Et was as ef he had died an' gone out o' sight forever."

Singular suggestion!

"Now," added Tommy, "the boys have sent me to see why you hev dropped us."

Oliver Graydon had ample food for thought. Tommy Carroll was a veritable city tough, but there was that in his manner, now, which left the listener without a doubt as to his sincerity. Tommy was telling the truth as near as he knew it.

Either he was strangely mistaken, or—Montgomery Call was a leader of river thieves!

When the escaped convict first assumed his stolen identity he would have been surprised at hearing all this, but he had grown somewhat acquainted with Montgomery Call. Now, he was astonished that that individual should think it worth his while to be a water pirate, but not surprised to learn that his moral nature was so depraved.

All this was secondary to one other question—what was he to do with Tommy Carroll?

If he denied that he was Captain Cinch there would be instant war—he could see that in the frowning gaze which Tommy bent upon him.

"Plainly," thought Graydon, "I must swallow Call's captaincy as I have his other sins and his wife."

It was no small matter, and he felt frightened by his new peril. He must meet it. Would it overwhelm him?

CHAPTER XXVII.

GRAYDON BECOMES A RIVER THIEF.

THE escaped convict rallied to the best of his ability.

"Tommy," he answered, forcing an unhappy smile to his face, "I was only joking with you. I could not help thinking how queer it was that you should have to come here and—. I have a cigar, Tommy!"

He passed over a fragrant weed, and the grim face before him relaxed. Tommy smiled, and he accepted the cigar.

"Light up, Tommy," pursued Graydon, with reckless amiability. "Here is a match. Never mind the smoke; the curtains can be cleaned."

"Cap'n Cinch, you are a brick!" declared Tommy, beaming. "But" with a sudden thought, and with darkening face—"you ain't told why you shook the band."

"I have not shaken them, my good sir. Instead"—Graydon had frantically grasped for a reason and found it—"I have been very ill, and unfit either to do business or go out of the house. I fell into the Hudson River while on an excursion, two weeks ago, and have been under a doctor's care ever since. I have been a very sick man, Tommy."

"Couldn't you write?"

"I could do nothing. My head was in shocking shape; I was near to brain fever. I have been all broken up."

The river thief lost his suspicion. Rascal though he was, he had a vein of good fellowship in his nature, and he felt for his leader.

"Cap'n, it was a howlin' shame!" he declared. "I'm sorry for you; I be that! Why, ef the boys had knowed et they would hev gone down on their knees an' walked the streets o' New York fer you—. But, o' course, that wouldn't hev helped ye; we couldn't help ye; fer we ain't no doctors. Hully geel but I'm glad you are better!"

"I am, thank you, and"—Graydon grew glib as he plunged into falsehood—"I was thinking of the band, to-day, and congratulating myself that my misfortune would not necessarily interfere with them."

Tommy glowed with pleasure.

"You're all ready ter resume work now, ain't yer?"

"Eh?"

"Ter begin givin' us orders, same as ever, as ter where we must make our breaks. The boys are a bit rusty. They ain't robbed nothin' but a few pikers, lately, an' they ain't gettin' rich on it. We want yer ter put us onter somethin' rich. We want ter steal all o' New York, boss."

Graydon experienced fresh trepidation,

but he knew his proper way, now. He took that way.

"You will have to wait a few days, more, Tommy. My head is not fit for planning—"

"But the boys need cash."

"Yes, but see here! Suppose I put you onto a job, and it pans out bad? It takes a clear head for such things. I don't want to send you after game and have you all gobbed by the police. Wait 'till I can do justice to a plan, and then you shall have one."

"Cap'n Cinch, you are right; you put et pat an' reasonable. We don't want ter git gobbed, an' we will wait till you git over yer sickness. It's a shame you had sech trouble; I'm right sorry; Of course the boys won't press ye while you're knocked out. When will you be in harness again?"

"Well, I should say in a week."

"That's all right; let et be so. I accept the propositon, Cap."

Tommy was satisfied, and the rest of his stay was passed in amiable conversation. He did not linger unduly, and, when he prepared to depart, Graydon gave him many cautions about being careful. Tommy promised to do all. He agreed that no more of the band should come to the house, and that they would recover all of the letters in the private office and have them destroyed. The band was to write no more until Captain Cinch wrote them he was ready for business.

The river thief rose, and then looked down at his grotesque attire with pride imprinted on his face.

"Cap," he remarked, "when the boys agreed I should come they all mixed in ter give me suitable clothes fer the trip. Did we do it wal?"

He gave a pull to his full dress coat which betokened great mental satisfaction, and Graydon did not destroy the picture of contentment.

"Admirably."

"This coat is a funny jigger, but I've seen the swells of Murray Hill wear such."

The host did not think it necessary to ask him if he had ever seen full dress worn in the morning, and Tommy was allowed to go his way in his happy frame of mind.

When he was in the street and fully gone the grotesqueness of the whole affair became a very small matter; there was something far more important to consider.

"What next?" wondered Graydon, blankly. "One by one I have shouldered Montgomery Call's sins, and now comes this. So he, quiet old chap that he seemed to be, was really a leader of river thieves! It dazes me; it is astonishing. I have heard of men who led double lives, and Montgomery Call surely seems to have been a champion in that line."

A more important feature of the case next claimed attention.

"Will these river thieves make trouble for me? Carroll was very ugly until I assured him I was not going to shake him and his fellows. If I try to shake them, will they seek to do me harm? Be that as it may, I can't risk it; I must keep them good natured. But how? Am I to turn river pirate, and give them orders as Montgomery Call did?"

Graydon made a despairing gesture.

"I thought my identity something well worth shaking, but when I took Call's place I assumed a worse life. What a knave he was!"

Another thought, and the speaker's face clouded.

"I can't be finical. I have killed my man!"

He went to his room and threw himself on his bed. Bitterly had he repented of having laid his hands on Walker Crosby in anger, and of late he had been shown what a fatal error it had been.

Joseph Randall asserted that he could prove Oliver Graydon innocent of the crime of embezzlement.

"Now, I can't resume my identity!" groaned the afflicted man. "Let me once do it and I pave the way for me to be hanged for the murder of Walker Crosby. I am hemmed in; I am lost—ruined utterly. Oh! my poor wife and child!"

Crime never repays its associate. Graydon had sinned under circumstances as pardonable as any circumstances could make crime, but it was an instrument of terror to the escaped convict now.

"Lost, lost!" was his reiteration.

He was interrupted by the coming of Bildad. The colored man at once saw that his master was in a depressed frame of mind. This was nothing new since the accident on the river, and Bildad was getting worried.

In the servitor's opinion, Mr. Call had acted "like another man" since the accident, and Bildad felt that he ought to cheer him up.

"Mr. Call, sah," he remarked, "you have not looked at the morning papers yet."

"I know it."

"Why not do it, sah?"

"I don't care to."

"Politics is hummin'."

"Let them hum."

"Plenty o' war news."

"Let them fight."

"News about the escaped convict, Graydon."

"Seen in Montana now, I suppose."

"Seen in New York City, sah."

"Humph!"

"He's dead, sah."

Graydon's face was shaded. He started, but managed to avoid looking around.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"Oliver Graydon has been found dead!"

"What?"

"Fished up out o' the river, drownded, Mr. Call!"

The impostor looked hard at the wall. He was careful to keep out of Bildad's line of vision. The news fell heavily upon him, yet it was not much of a surprise. He grasped the situation with the freedom of one in the secret.

"The body of Montgomery Call has been found," he decided, to himself.

The colored man talked on, but he saw nothing more to show that his master was interested. He had come in to perform some trifling service, and the impostor soon sent him out. When he was gone the so-called master swooped down upon the morning paper with tumultuous avidity.

It was not hard to find the article. Surrounded with big headlines, the story ran thus:

"The whereabouts of Oliver Graydon has been fully determined. Last night a boatman who was rowing on the North River noticed a floating body. He notified Patrolman Evans, and the remains were towed ashore. When this was done a discovery followed.

"The dead man was Graydon, the convict. The identification has been rendered perfect by several officers, including one who originally arrested Graydon, and two of the present Sing Sing officers.

"The body had no wound, and no bruise further than those natural to one who had been in the river so long. Death was by drowning. It is likely that he was drowned the night of his escape, in trying to swim the Hudson near Sing Sing.

"The body is at the Morgue."

The paper fell from the reader's hands. A peculiar expression was on his face. He muttered hoarsely:

"Exit, Oliver Graydon. He will soon be buried. Montgomery Call still lives, and I am irrevocably hel!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RACHEL VISITS THE MORGUE.

Of all the places in the city of New York that are not pleasant to delicate nerves, the Morgue ranks at the head. Death is always somberly impressive, but when it is united with violence, mystery or crime, it becomes shocking; and with the horrors of the house of death to accompany it, it passes description in its unpleasant features.

To the Morgue, the same day that the impostor read his own obituary, came a young woman, fair and sweet, but sad and shrinking. It was Rachel Graydon.

The wife and daughter of the escaped convict had not failed to see the notice of his death, and it had brought Rachel to the place where the body was said to be.

The announcement had been a terrible one to Mrs. Graydon, and Rachel, in seeking to console her, had chanced to say that it might all be an error.

These unworldly women did not know how common a thing it was for false identifications of the drowned to be made, but upon the bare chance of false identification they now pinned the hopes of their stricken hearts.

Catching at the bare chance, they grew strategic. Planning as skillfully as experienced persons could have done, they determined that Rachel should go, not openly to ask permission to see the dead man, but to seek, according to claim, for a missing friend, to whom she gave a bogus name, and thus gain chance to see the drowned man.

It was the worst of Rachel's many trials when she reached there, and, even when she had paused at the door and summoned all the resolution she could command, she was so beset by the rapid throbbing of her heart that she was hardly able to do anything in the line of her errand.

Whether the keepers of the place were usually gruff or not, she did not find them especially so to her. Perhaps she had a face that appealed even to them, for she was kindly treated.

There were but few bodies in the Morgue then. She compelled herself to look at all, so that her real errand might not be suspected, and she pronounced each one not the Mr. Amos Brown who, according to her claim, she was anxious to see.

"That's all," finally observed her guide; "that is, all but the body of Graydon, the drowned convict."

Rachel's heart seemed to leap into her throat.

"I—I will see that," she faltered.

"But he can't be your Mr. Brown."

"I would like to make sure—"

"Easily done. Come with me."

She was conducted to the last of the unpleasant objects. When there, and the face was visible, she almost swooned. First sight was confirmative of the report that Oliver Graydon lay there, but she had gone, not to dumbly corroborate what others claimed, but to disprove their assertions.

Steeling her nerves, she looked with care. Wonderfully like her father the dead man looked, but her eyes were those of affection, and she would take no first impression.

At this point the guide was forced to be busy for awhile, and she had all the time she wanted. When he returned she was still by the body, but apparently through.

"I reckon that is not your man," suggested he.

"It is not Amos Brown."

Rachel spoke with more firmness than she had yet shown, and she turned away. She was through with the house of death. As soon as possible, and not proceed with undue precipitation, she left the building wholly. She hastened homeward.

Her arrival at the latter place broke the most painful wait of Mrs. Graydon's life. When her daughter entered she turned her sightless eyes upon her, and her voice rung out sharply:

"Rachel, Rachel, don't keep me an instant in suspense!"

The younger woman threw her arms around her companion's neck.

"Hope!" was her sole reply.

"Hope?"

"Yes; hope on. Do not despair; the quest is not ended."

"Wasn't it he?"

"Our loved one is not in the Morgue!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Then why did they say so?"

"Because the resemblance is such that their mistake was natural and excusable. Ah! they did not have the eyes of love to help them on! The unfortunate dead man was wonderfully like poor father, but it was not he. I know it!—yes, I know it!"

The blind woman clasped her hands.

"Heaven be praised!" she murmured, brokenly.

"The police have made a mistake," continued Rachel, rapidly. "I do not wonder at it, for there was ground for the error on their part, but I cannot make my assertion too strong that I am sure it was not father. They say the body has been long in the water, but the face is wonderfully preserved. It was that unusual preservation

which led them into error, and led me to be positive as to the truth. I know not who the dead man was, but it was not father."

"It had long been in the water?" questioned Mrs. Graydon.

"Yes."

"Another item of proof. We saw Oliver but recently in Central Park?"

"I thought of that too, mother."

"But, Rachel, are you sure it was he we saw in the Park?"

"Absolutely certain."

"Why—why did he then flee from us?"

"Mother, you know we decided positively that he was so frightened at being accosted by us that he did not recognize us."

"So we did."

"Mother, our quest is not yet over. We know he lives; we will seek for him; we will find him."

"We will!" declared the blind woman. "Our Heavenly Father will not permit us to fail!"

The faith and devotion of the two women was touching and beautiful. These two noble elements of their nature had survived the crushing hand of poverty, grief and personal danger.

While they were still talking they had a visitor. It was an unexpected one, yet no stranger. The younger lady recognized Skimmer Nichols.

"Dropped in on biz!" abruptly remarked the street boy, when greetings were over.

"Did you come from Mr. Proctor?" inquired Rachel, eagerly.

"Come from S. Nichols, Esquire; also with him, an' in honored company," modestly answered Skimmer. "Say, you want ter look a little out!"

"What do you mean?"

"You know Henry Kneeland?"

"Only too well," returned Rachel, shivering.

"You'll know him better if you don't look wild. He's goin' ter abduct ye; he is."

"Abduct me?"

"Foller ye home, jest now. So did I. Seen him follerin', an' jest dropped in behind him. He housed ye all right. Guess wot he did next?"

"What?"

"Went ter a cabby an' hired him ter take ye away as soon as he could steal ye."

"Be explicit!"

"I will. Henry—dang his buttons!—is goin' ter send a bogus telegraph, purportin' ter come from Rod Proctor, askin' you ter meet him at a corner, this eve. Of course, Rod will not be there. Henry will! Then he will seize onto you an' bear ye, whther or no. See?"

"New danger to face!" exclaimed Rachel. "When we are in so much trouble, can't we be permitted to act our own way without extra danger from him?"

"Wal, you bet high you can!" exclaimed Skimmer, in return. "Mister Henry Kneeland will get his nose knocked seven different ways, ef he don't look lofty. Rod Proctor will do it, sure, an' ef he don't, I will, by gum!"

Skimmer threw himself into an attitude and looked duly fierce.

"Rachel, this is alarming," sighed Mrs. Graydon.

"Oh! it will be all right," assured the boy; "only this much is sure—you mustn't go out at all."

"But we must!" declared Rachel.

"Henry will gobble you."

"The danger must be risked."

"Then," added the boy, seriously, "Rod Proctor an' me must jest call on Henry an' lick him so silly he will be in the hospital until you get your work done. That's wot!"

"Noble boy, we thank you for your devotion."

"Not at all; not at all! Rod an' me frequently do sech things—leastwise, I do. Until we do it, jest you look out fer Henry. He is a kind o' biped that ranks cantankerous in New York—a reg'lar pirate, he is. Look out! He will steal you, an' then you won't never get out o' his clutches."

Skimmer moved toward the door, as if his work was done, but the two women saw in the warning unmistakable signs that, henceforth, their task would be more difficult and more dangerous. Troubles multiplied.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DETECTIVE'S DISCOVERIES.

It was again evening, and Joseph Randall was walking along the street. His expression was thoughtful, and he did not seem at all satisfied. It was not false to its trust as an index of his feelings; he was decidedly dissatisfied.

He had been out of town the greater part of the day, and where he could not get the morning papers. When he returned, he read that Oliver Graydon's body had been found in the North River. It was too late for him to go to the Morgue, even if he was ambitious of seeking to identify a man he supposed he never had met; but those who had done the identifying seemed so trustworthy that he did not think of questioning the correctness of the report that Graydon was dead.

It was a great disappointment to him.

He had secured proof that Graydon had been innocent of the embezzling charge, and had planned much on the glory he expected to reap.

Now, it seemed that his glory would be dimmed vastly, and the vindication of the escaped convict rendered useless to himself.

"I'll go over and let Rodney Proctor console me," was his thought.

He was on the way, and he soon reached the house and rung the bell. Being well known, the servant acquiesced smilingly in his observation that he would go unanswered to Rodney's room. He went; he knocked on the door; he had no reply.

He tried the door; it was not fastened.

He walked in.

The first thing he saw was alarming. Rodney lay prostrate on the floor, and the fact that he remained there told a plain story to his friend. Randall sprung forward and raised him partially up.

"Unconscious!" he exclaimed.

The detective was surprised. Rodney was a young and healthy man, and Joseph believed that he knew him well enough to be able to say he was not subject to such attacks.

"I would as soon have thought of fainting myself."

Not caring for to cause alarm and comment, and being well versed in such matters, the new-comer set to work to restore Rodney himself. He knew there was a flask of brandy in the closet, kept for possible emergencies, and he secured this and poured a quantity down the throat of his companion.

Then he fell to chasing his hands.

Rodney's coat seemed to be in the way, and he proceeded to remove it. This was not the simplest of tasks, as Rodney lay a dead weight, and the garment was so disarranged in the attempt that a photograph fell from the pocket.

This article did not excite any undue curiosity on Randall's part. To preserve it from damage he stepped to lay it on the table. As he did so, his gaze unconsciously fell to the picture.

It was that of a man of middle age, robust of frame and strong of face.

It was not this that made Randall stop short and bend his regard designedly and sharply on the picture. Strangely familiar was the likeness, and he grew bewildered.

"It's exactly like Montgomery Call!" he murmured.

His first view gave him the impression; then second view brought conviction.

"It is Call!" he declared. "In the name of the singular, what is Rodney doing with Call's picture? I did not know he even knew Montgomery. This is odd!"

Not long did he pause to wonder on the subject; he had more important duties to attend to. He went to Proctor and began to aid resuscitation further, and not long had he kept it up when his efforts were rewarded.

Rodney revived; he stirred; he opened his eyes; he looked around with full consciousness.

"Be easy!" spoke Randall. "The trouble is all over."

Rodney leaped to his feet.

"Are they gone?" he demanded.

"Gone? Who?"

"Kneeland and his companion."

"What? You don't mean—"

"They have been here!" rapidly explained the young man. "They attacked me; we

fought sharply. They were two to one, but I made it so hot for them that they were glad to retreat as they came in—by the window. I followed. Kneeland turned upon me at the window and—well, I saw a sandbag raised, and I suspect he struck me with it. I remember no more."

He spoke coherently, and, strange as it seemed, Randall was of the opinion that he spoke with a clear mind, and in perfect correctness.

"Let us pursue—"

"No," replied Rodney, glancing at the clock. "We should be too late by far. They have had time to get fully clear. I happened to look at the clock as they intruded—it was in that way that I saw them soon enough to fight them. Let it go, Joe, and score one to Henry Kneeland. He wins the round."

"Why did he come? What was his object?"

"Merely to do me personal injury, I think."

"A fine fellow, he is."

"We shall meet again, and Mr. Kneeland shall hear from me."

Proctor spoke coolly, and he turned and put on his coat with an air of unconcern. He was Randall's personal friend, and the detective was anxious to discuss the case. It was talked over fully. By that time the detective was convinced that no real injury had been done to Rodney, and they ceased to look so serious.

Randall had forgotten the errand which brought him there. Before it recurred to his mind he chanced to look toward the table.

"Rod," he exclaimed, "allow me to ask you a question. I am not an over-inquisitive person, I think, and I would not search a friend's pockets, but when I took your coat off, something dropped from it which puzzles me. May I ask how you became acquainted with the original of yonder photograph?"

He stepped forward, lifted the picture, and held it out.

Rodney was silent. It had been given to him by Rachel Graydon, or Miss Forrest, as he knew her; and he was not disposed to violate his promise to her. He was bound in honor to tell nothing.

"That's a friend of mine," he answered.

"I did not know you knew him."

"Do you?" carelessly asked Rodney, thinking it only a chance resemblance.

"Quite well."

"Then we need not worry about him."

"But how did you happen to know him?" persisted the detective.

"Chance; the same as we all know each other."

"Why do you carry this in your pocket?"

"Really, Joe, you ask too many questions. My hair is rumpled; allow me to fix it. Excuse the impoliteness. Was it raining when you came in?"

Randall was not slow of wits. He perceived plainly enough that, for some reason, his companion did not want more said on the subject, and that he did not intend to give his help. Joseph did not let it drop so easily.

"Rod, I will thank you to tell me all you know—"

"Pardon me, Joe, but I can do nothing of the sort. You do not know the original of the picture; if you think you do, it is an error. The man at whose shadow you are now looking does not live in New York. Resemblances are common enough."

Proctor turned resolutely toward the glass, and the detective was left to ponder over the picture. He did more. He had been told that the original did not live in New York. Where, then, did he live? Possibly the name of the artist would tell something.

He turned the picture over. The artist's name was not there.

Something else arrested Joseph's attention—a word or two written there in pencil marks so dim as to be almost unreadable and unnoticeable. He held the card closer to the light. Then two words—a name—grew into shape in his mind.

Oliver Graydon!

The detective was staggered. Of all names he had the least expected to see that. What did it mean?

There are times when the human mind works with remarkable quickness. Randall forgot that he had pronounced the picture that of Montgomery Call, and so other things flashed one after the other through his recollection.

First, Mrs. Forrest and her daughter had come to New York to search for a missing man. Secondly, they had enlisted Rodney in their behalf. Thirdly, the name of Oliver Graydon was on the photograph. Lastly, the escaped convict had been supposed to be a fugitive in New York, and he had a wife and a daughter somewhere in the country.

Rodney finished combing his hair and turned away from the glass. Randall had laid the photograph down and was leaning carelessly against the mantel. The detective looked calm and easy. There was a suspiciously bright light in his eyes, but he gave no further sign of emotion.

"Rod," he remarked, quietly, "you want to look out for Henry Kneeland. He was foiled this time, but you may hear from him again."

To all appearances the speaker no longer had interest in the picture. It was not mentioned again, and in a few minutes Randall made an excuse to leave. He went. Once on the street he muttered blankly:

"I don't understand this. Oliver Graydon is dead, yet I have seen his picture, and it is exactly like Montgomery Call. This needs study!"

CHAPTER XXX.

A VICTORY WON.

THE convict impostor sat in his private room and meditated on the situation as it now confronted him.

"Oliver Graydon is legally dead. A body has been found in the river, and competent judges say it is that of the escaped Sing Sing prisoner. That settles it, for I know of nobody connected with the police who is more competent to identify Oliver Graydon. He has been identified by these experts, and that ends his career. Exit, Graydon."

The speaker made a motion, as if brushing Oliver Graydon away from his sight.

"I am Montgomery Call! I have the new identity fully in hand. The true Call is dead, so he cannot appear to dispute my claim, and nobody else will be allowed to do it—I will hold fast to the grip I have. I am Montgomery Call, captain of river thieves, and—murderer of Morris Glynn, of England! A fine identity!"

Carefully he considered this part of the case.

"I think I can manage the river thief part, somehow," he pursued. "The Morris Glynn episode is not so pleasant; I do not like to shoulder somebody else's sins of that kind. But the Glynn affair is nearly twenty years old, and may never be revived. I wish I knew its exact bearings."

Another pause, and then he touched the bell. A chambermaid came, and he asked that Mrs. Trull be requested to come to him.

Susanna came. Just then she was in high feather. Graydon had done some favor which she appreciated, and her amiability was at the front. Susanna was variable, and she went from one extreme to another. Graydon was learning to manage her, and he now intended to try strategy on her, with the end in mind of bringing out a full statement concerning Morris Glynn.

He met her with a very serious face.

"Be seated!" he directed, gravely; "be seated, please."

"Thank you, Simeon, I will."

Mrs. Trull sat down, beaming delightedly. Graydon looked at the floor and sighed deeply. He did not show a disposition to go on with the conversation. Susanna noticed his appearance of moodiness and became worried.

"Simeon, you are ill!" she declared.

"Not in body," Graydon replied, with another sigh.

"How, then?"

"In mind."

"What is wrong?"

"I have called you to explain, but I do not feel equal to it."

"Simeon Trull, you just make my blood curdle!" declared Susanna, in alarm. "I pray,

what is wrong? Do not keep me in suspense, but let me know the worst."

"My happy home!" murmured the escaped convict, brokenly.

"What of it? Oh! speak out, Simeon; speak out. Say it quick!"

Graydon's cunning had accomplished its object; he had made her duly nervous, and he was ready to go further.

"I apprehend that I shall have to flee from New York."

"Flee? Why?"

"Because bitter fate hems me in and tears at my heart-strings."

"Oh! you scare me all to pieces; you chill my blood. What is it?—what is it?"

Since becoming an inmate of the house Mrs. Trull had tried to fan the embers of her olden fancy for her husband into a flame. She had not been highly successful, and it was not affection for Simeon but fear for Susanna that now agitated her.

Graydon saw all this, and he hesitated no longer. Assuming the most lugubrious look imaginable, he pursued his devious way in these words:

"You know Perkins Crosby?"

"Too well."

"He threatens me. He declares he will have heavy blackmail from me—ay, he demands a sum which would impoverish us—and he is not to be appeased. Money or ruin is the watchword! I positively can't buy him off to the extent he demands, and, as he will surely keep his threat, there is but one other thing open to me—flight!"

"Where—where will you go?"

"To Alaska! There is no other suitable place. Alaska, the remote, the snowy, the barren, the unexplored. Yes, I must lose myself in that trackless land of ice, and never more be seen of my fellow-men. sorrowful fate—and all my money will fade away!"

Mrs. Trull was pale with emotion. If his money faded away where would she come in for a living?

"Simeon," she sharply cried, "why should you do this? What hold has Perkins Crosby on you that you should thus abandon all?"

"Ah! you forget Morris Glynn!"

"What about him?"

"He died by violence."

A look of understanding flashed to Mrs. Trull's face.

"Does Perkins Crosby hold that tale over you as a menace?"

"Yes."

"Defy him!"

"What?"

"Defy him! Defy the base schemer! Eject him from the house, and save our home."

"But I can't. Crosby says I murdered Glynn—"

"He deceives you."

"In what way?"

"Let me tell all. There was a time that you were accused of killing Morris Glynn, but the whole truth finally came out. After some months of suspicion against you it was learned that the real slayer of Glynn was a poacher. You did fight with Glynn—you won't deny that, yourself, but he was little hurt. After you left him he met a poacher, and it was then he was killed. The poacher went on his raids once too often, later, and he was fired on and fatally wounded. Before he died he confessed to having slain Glynn. Your name has been clear of that deed for many long years."

"But why did Crosby thus accuse me?"

"He was but briefly in England, himself; he may be sincere in believing you guilty. Possibly he was wrongly informed, you see. But, Simeon, you can rely on what I tell you; it is all true."

Graydon tried to curb his exultation.

"Don't blame me for keeping this still so long," implored Mrs. Trull. "Of course I knew that Crosby saw you about this, but I did not think it would be serious. Simeon, I brought proof of your innocence from England, so I could clear you. Poor, dear Hope has carried the papers furnishing proof in her bosom all the while. They were nearly lost, once, for she was abducted by Crosby's tools, taken out on the river and tipped into the water. Even then she was faithful to her trust—wet though she was, she would not change her damp clothes un-

til she got home, for fear the papers would be lost. Simeon, you are safe!"

Mrs. Trull paused for breath, gasped a few times and added:

"Now, you need not flee, need you?"

"No," replied Graydon, exultantly.

"That's right, dear; stay here. Stay with me. Be of good cheer. Be brave; dare to be a Daniel—I mean, don't get alarmed."

Susanna was somewhat incoherent, but Graydon did not heed it. His strategy had worked to a charm, and the truth was out. Morris Glynn, as a scarecrow, faded into nothingness, and he felt his grip tightening on his new identity.

There was a good deal of further conversation, but it amounted to little except to them. The convict was so pleased with the situation that, out of gratitude, he suggested that he call a carriage and allow Mrs. Trull and her daughter to go to ride in Central Park.

It was Susanna's reward of merit.

She accepted the chance. She asked Graydon to go with them, but he excused himself kindly. The two women went alone, in due time, and Graydon had the house to himself.

"Things are not so bad, after all!" he cried, laughing. "Oliver C. Graydon is dead, and his crimes died with him. Montgomery Call lives—I am he! I am a captain of river thieves, and a few other ignoble things, but I have not the murder of Morris Glynn to answer for now. Good-by, Morris; you will be seen no more."

The speaker was walking the floor. Exhilarated, he made a sudden turn to the closet where he kept his—or Call's—cigars. The box was empty; he had smoked the fragrant weeds to the last.

"Never mind; I will send Bildad out for more. Send him? Why not go myself? I'm free—free! Yes, I'll go to the nearest store and select for myself. A captain of river thieves ought to be able to smoke the best!"

He laughed excitedly. It was not a mirthful laugh, however. The truth was that he was in a condition almost hysterical, and far from being himself. Mary Graydon and Rachel were at that moment forgotten. It was not to be blamed against him; he had not weakened in his devotion to them.

He put on his hat; he went to the nearest cigar-store; he was cordially but respectfully greeted by the proprietor as "Mr. Call;" he made due purchase and returned home.

In the hall he passed Bildad. Nodding to him he went into the parlor on a momentary errand. Then he heard voices outside the door. He turned and walked out into the hall. There the greatest shock of all awaited him.

He stood face to face with Mary Graydon and Rachel!

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MOST PAINFUL SCENE OF ALL.

The thunderbolt had come; the escaped convict was with his wife and child, and, this time, he had not the wide stretches of Central Park to enable him to flee from their loving search.

Rachel, as usual, held to her mother's arm. The blind woman could not yet know that her husband was within reach of her, but with the daughter it was different. Her eyes sought her father's face—not with uncertainty and questioning, but in a way which would have moved any observer.

As if the lightning had struck him stood Graydon. His face blanched and he fell to trembling violently. He was stirred to a remarkable pitch, but chiefly with dismay.

Stunned, he unconsciously backed into the parlor. Rachel, holding to her mother's arm, followed. Then she closed the door. Bildad was shut out, bewildered, and left to wonder over it all. As he was not a listener, he did no more than wonder.

Father, mother and daughter were by themselves in the parlor. Rachel did not get the welcome she craved, and she broke forth in words.

"Father, why don't you speak to me?" she asked.

Mary Graydon started violently.

"Father!" she repeated, in a thrilling whisper. "Is he here? Is Oliver with us?"

She put out her hand, as if to feel the way to him.

"He is here," replied Rachel. "Father, why don't you speak?"

All of Oliver Graydon's love went out to them then. He longed to rush forward and press them to his heart; he longed for it as if it were his one hope of paradise; but he remembered Walker Crosby.

"Oh! powers of mercy!" he inwardly groaned, "my bliss is here and I cannot seize it—my loved ones are here and I cannot acknowledge them. They would shrink from a murderer, and I killed Walker Crosby! I must deny all; I am Montgomery Call!"

Thinking thus, he rallied in a measure and spoke—a miserable, pitiable, pitiful apology for disguised speech.

"Madam," he enunciated, and, surely, it was not the voice of Oliver Graydon, "you labor under some mistake. I—I—do not—know you!"

Perspiration poured out on his brow, and his trembling lips were blue and strained.

Rachel recoiled.

"Not know us!" she echoed.

"I do not!"

"But, father—"

"Pardon me; you seem to have mistaken me for somebody else. My name is Montgomery Call."

Thus far Mrs. Graydon had stood undecided. Lacking the power of sight she had been at a loss, and, surely, his voice was enough unlike his own to deceive almost any one, but she had the instinct of love. Harsh and grating though the voice was, she knew her husband.

"Oliver, Oliver!" she cried, "do not jest with us. We have searched for you; we have looked far and wide, and through many perils. Now we have found you, do you think we would betray you? No, no; we would die for you. Dear love! it is Mary who speaks!"

She stretched out her arms; she spoke with utmost eloquence—the eloquence of the heart—and Graydon suffered untold anguish in his efforts to hold to his position.

But he summoned new resolution and spoke again in the harsh, grating voice which his misery made natural.

"Again I say, there is an error. Who is this man you refer to? I never heard of him. I am"—he drew his figure up straighter—"I am Montgomery Call!"

"No, no; you are Oliver Graydon."

"I never heard of the man."

"Father!" cried Rachel, "do you fear to trust us?—to trust us?"

"Do you claim that you know Montgomery Call?"

"No, but—"

"I am he; that's my name."

Scarcely knowing what he did, but with a pitiful effort to be calm and dignified, he drew a visiting card from his pocket and handed it to his daughter. She read the name; she saw that it was that of Montgomery Call.

Rachel was bewildered. Not for a moment did she doubt her own identification; she knew that her father was before her; but she could not understand the rest.

"Rachel," faltered the blind woman, "what does this mean?"

"Alas, mother, I do not know."

"Heavenly Father!" implored the wife. "give me sight now, if only for the hour, so I can see for myself. Let me know if Oliver is here, I implore thee. But why do I doubt?—I know it; I cannot be deceived—Oliver is here!"

"Oliver Graydon is dead!" broke forth the tortured man.

"He is not! I have seen the body claimed as his; I know it was not his. I cannot be deceived; I was not deceived then any more than I am now," answered Rachel.

"Young woman, I feel for you," answered the convict. "I can well understand that this has been a harsh experience for you. It is a horrible thing to have one's father go to prison as a criminal—"

"But you were innocent," interrupted Rachel.

"The law said that Oliver Graydon was guilty, and the law cannot err. The law," bitterly added Graydon, "is without guile or mistake. It is painful for you, but so it is. Young woman, forget Oliver Graydon. He is dead. Remember only that, and let him rest in his grave. He will thank you for

it, and in his grave he will still—love you!"

The forced composure of the speaker gave way, and his voice shook and ceased to be heard. Mrs. Graydon took Rachel by the arm.

"He is mad," she whispered, tremulously. The idea had not occurred to Rachel before, but it now came with convincing force. Rachel did not know of the affair by the river, when Walker Crosby went out of sight. Not knowing this, she could see no good reason why a loving father should disown them. The new theory explained all, and she accepted it as the true one.

What was to be done? Her father was masquerading as Montgomery Call. What could she do for him?

Graydon recovered a little and looked at the clock.

"I have some important business to attend to," he pursued, "and I must ask you to excuse me. If you will kindly leave me alone, now, I will visit you and talk more of this. Maybe I can help you. In any case, I should like to see you again. Yes, I really should like"—he faltered and nearly broke down, but managed to add: "I should like to see you again!"

Rachel was not ready to be disposed of thus, for they had sight of Graydon and they might not see him again. She did not yield, but persevered in trying to soothe him, as she regarded it; and in seeking to bring about some satisfactory understanding.

She did not succeed, and, as the moments wore on and the return of Mrs. Trull and Hope became more imminent, he grew so nervous that she saw there was only one way to do.

She took her mother and went away.

The parting was without plans for the future—and well might it be—even Rachel was so at a loss as to what she should do that she desired time to meditate.

Left to himself, Graydon hurried to his room.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed, unnaturally. "I did that well; I held my own, and thoroughly deceived them. It was the last act in the drama. Oliver Graydon is dead—long live Montgomery Call! Ha, ha, ha!"

Wildly he laughed, and then fell to smoking furiously.

"The battle goes on famously. I am Captain Cinch, the river pirate—Egad! why shouldn't I call around and see my fellow-outlaws! I will; by my life! I'll do it! I'll drop in this evening and see them. Tommy Carroll gave me the place, and I will not be unneighborly. From this hour I branch out as Captain Cinch!"

A few moments of thought, and then he hurled the cigar away.

"Lost, lost!" he groaned. "Poor wife—poor Rachel!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

GRAYDON VISITS THE RIVER THIEVES.

The day passed after a fashion. Toward night he prepared to carry out his last reckless decision. Rachel had not been wholly wrong when she accepted her mother's belief that Graydon was not right mentally. He was affected in that way to a certain degree.

He had been at his worst when he decided to visit the river thieves, but, even when he grew calmer, he did not waver.

"I must have some excitement," he exclaimed. "This apathy will drive me mad."

He went at what he believed would be the proper hour. He put on no disguise, for, since the police had decided that the body of Oliver Graydon was in their hands, he did not think there was any special danger of moving about the city.

The journey to the lair of the thieves was duly and successfully made.

He reached the pier and sought entrance.

When Tommy Carroll was at the house he had let enough drop so that Graydon felt capable of giving enough satisfaction to get inside. Once seen he would, of course, be at home with them.

He knocked.

There was some delay, and he had to repeat the summons, but it was finally answered. A man looked out with great caution. No light was shown, but Graydon was gruffly asked what was wanted.

"If you don't know enough to recognize me, call Tommy Carroll here," jauntily replied the applicant.

"Thunder! it's the captain!"

"Nobody else. How is it?—do I come in?"

"Why, of course you do. Walk right in! Sorry to delay you, Cap; but you didn't signal, and I wasn't sure it was one of the party."

They entered the room where the rest of the thieves were.

"The captain!" was the general cry.

"Yes, boys, it is I. Just dropped in to see you a moment. How goes everything? How is the band?"

His questions were unheeded. They were so much pleased to see him that they could think of nothing else. All crowded around him, and every man had to shake hands. Graydon received them with cordiality and hail-fellowship which pleased them still more. The real Captain Cinch had never been a social person, and the hearty hand-shakes they received from him now—as they supposed—marked a new and agreeable era.

Tommy Carroll waxed hilarious.

"Boys," he shouted, "we want ter give the Cap a send-off, by gar! Where's the whisky?"

"Yes, trot out the whisky. You'll drink, won't you, Cap?"

"You bet your life I will!" declared Graydon.

He had been a very temperate man in the past, but it was not so now. The whisky was brought—excellent stuff they had stolen on one of their raids—and all partook. Graydon did not drink in gingerly fashion.

General and vivacious conversation followed. The river thieves were overjoyed by the return of their leader, and all wanted to talk at once. They came near doing it, but Graydon was not left in the shuffle—he did his share, and excited them to wild enthusiasm by his friendly jollity.

Even this did not satisfy him, and when business was referred to, he commanded all to be still while he talked on that subject.

"I have been under the weather," he explained, "and my pockets have grown empty. They must be filled. So must yours."

"Hurrah for Captain Cinch!" was the enthusiastic cry.

"We are going to make things bum now," added the reputed captain. "We will steal all of the city, if they don't look out. We will carry on raids the like of which have never been done before. I shall not keep in my house and be plain and sulky Montgomery Call. I am going to forget that my name is Montgomery Call, and come out with you. Right at the front you will find me, helping to rob and carry off the plunder!"

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

The gang nearly went wild.

Unfortunate Oliver Graydon! He was enjoying himself, as he thought, to the full, but it was a lamentable and sad moment in his life. The demon of derangement was buzzing in his brain, and he was an irresponsible person then.

He talked on. He laid out a general plan which might have impoverished the whole city of New York, if it could have been carried to consummation. Later, it might occur to the men that it was a wild plan, but they were merely enthusiastic then; they could think of no more.

In the midst of it all there was a sudden crash.

The door flew in, and men poured into the room.

They were the blue-coated police of New York!

Instantly the scene changed. Enthusiasm died out, and the thieves became panic-struck at once.

"Don't let them escape!" was the order of the blue coat leader.

Escape was just what the thieves wanted to do, but Blue-coat billys were busy, and many a hard head received a rap.

Nothing in the world could have recalled Oliver Graydon to his senses more effectually.

He had tried to run with the rest, but collided with a bigger man, and was tumbled down under a table. Over the top of this

table was a low-hanging cloth, and as he fell this flapped into place.

Looking out, he saw that he was nearly concealed, and, under the impulse of the moment, he lay still.

Outside his hiding-place the fight was fully on. Officer and thief grappled and fought fiercely.

Worse was coming. The thieves were not disposed to surrender under any condition. They were all old criminals, and to be captured meant a term in Sing Sing of many years.

A revolver shot sounded. It was in effect like a signal—other shots came after it, and the wildest scene possible ensued.

"Heavens!" gasped Graydon, "what have I walked into? It is Inferno let loose. A lunatic asylum would be quiet compared with this. All here will be captured. Then—awful thought! I shall again be a convict, and that, too, as leader of river thieves. I was mad to come here—mad, mad!"

A veritable horror was upon him, and with the sounds of shots, fierce cries and general demoralization ringing in his ears, it seemed as if it was, as he had said, Inferno.

Presently the fact dawned upon him that the refuge he was in could be no more than a temporary one.

"They will have me out, if I stay. I must escape!"

With this thought in mind he hurried out. He saw a point at one side where the way to a window had been left clear by the surging of the contestants. He ran to the window and looked out. The distance to the pier was such that he was alarmed.

"I dare not risk it!" he muttered.

"Hold on, there!"

It was a voice in the rear, and, looking around, he saw a burly blue-coat rushing toward him. That decided Graydon. Be it life or death, he must take the venture.

He leaped from the window.

He fell; he alighted with a crash; he toppled off the edge of the pier; he dropped into the water of the dock.

He was shaken and bruised, but the instinct of self-preservation remained strong. He began to swim vigorously.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OUTLAWRY GROWS OBNOXIOUS.

GRAYDON would ordinarily have been quite equal to the task of getting out of the water in safety, if left alone, but, now he had been so shaken by the fall that he soon found that he had left the dock and was out in the river, itself. That never would do, and he turned back.

He regained the dock, and using good judgment, at last, he sought to climb to the pier.

He grasped a timber and pulled, but his strength was impaired and he was unequal to the task. He slipped back.

"I shall be drowned!"

The thought came to him with painful intensity, and he tried again. Once more he was not equal to it, but, just as he was about to fall, a hand grasped his wrist and he was lifted steadily up.

In the darkness he could see but little of his rescuer, but he gave his own aid, and was duly landed on the pier. Weak as he was, he struggled to his feet.

"Thunder!" cried a voice, "it's the captain!"

Graydon looked; he recognized his rescuer.

"Tommy Carroll!" he exclaimed.

"Nobody else," was the reply.

"How came you here?"

"I skipped."

"We shall be captured."

"We will skip again. Come with me."

Tommy was cool, and Graydon did not fail to see how valuable his aid and advice were then. He made no remonstrance to the suggestion, but quickly followed his companion.

"We must make a try ter cross the street," pursued Tommy. "I reckon every point is guarded fer blocks around, but the bold gambler is always the winner. Come with me, an' when I run, do you run too, as fast as your legs will carry you."

Tommy dashed across the street, and Graydon followed close after. The latter

had expected a run along the block, but, much to his surprise, his leader banged open a door in an old house and then drew him in.

"By gum! that is one on them!" exclaimed Tommy.

"We must not delay here."

"What shall we do?"

"Hasten toward the center of the city."

"Not much!"

"We shall be found unless we do."

"We shall be found, sure pop, ef we do, boss. Take my word fer it, all them streets will be garrisoned. Et was jest one chance in forty that we got here. Now, we ain't goin' ter be fool enough ter go out."

"The people of the house will betray us."

"They won't unless they see us. Boss, I know somethin' about this old rookery, an' ef you will trust ter me, we will see ef we can't fool these coppers. Come along!"

Graydon remonstrated no more. He was still in a panic because of the danger of falling into the hands of the blue-coats, and ready to seize almost any available chance. He went with Tommy.

The latter felt his way in the darkness for several minutes, passing slowly from one room to another, and then stopped and fumbled at his feet for awhile. This done, he directed:

"Drop down!"

"Where?"

"I have took up a board, an' it leaves a hole in the floor. Ef we drop it is only a few feet, an' no cop won't find us there."

Graydon was not pleased, but he tried the experiment. He found the hole in the floor, lowered himself slightly and then dropped. He went down and landed on a solid foundation with a thump. Shaken but not injured, he stood still and Tommy quickly came after.

"There!" murmured the river thief, with an air of satisfaction; "it is done. I fixed the board back in place before I fell, an' now there ain't no sign visible above us."

"We are in the dark."

"Wait a bit."

Again Tommy moved around, and he soon struck a match. It was the preliminary to the lighting of a kerosene lamp, and the darkness was soon dispelled. Graydon looked around him and saw a bleak, basement-like room, utterly unfurnished, except that a safe stood at one side.

"What sort of a place is this?" he demanded, in wonder.

"A vault."

"Do you consider that we are safe here?"

"Yes."

"The police will search far and wide."

"Let 'em search!" retorted Tommy. "They won't find this hole, an' none o' the band kin give us away, fer I reckon none o' them knows of this cellar."

"Do you think the men would betray us if they could?"

"There is a Judas in every band, boss, an' there must be in our. The band is broke up permanent, an' some smart Isaac will give us all away."

Graydon was alarmed.

"Give us away?"

"Yes. They may hold out fer a few days, but, sooner or later, the whole biz will be told ter the coppers."

"That means that—that—I shall be advertised as the leader—don't it?"

"I don't want ter worry ye, Cap, but it will be a wonder ef the city ain't soon blazoned with the news that Montgomery Call was the captain of the band."

Graydon was mute with dismay. The fever in his blood which had made him willing for the time to be an outlaw was all gone.

He sat down on the floor and remained silent while Tommy bewailed the ill-luck of the night.

Presently Graydon rallied a little.

"What safe is this?" he asked.

"Belongs ter a green-goods man."

"Why is it here?"

"Trick o' his-way ter avoid publicity. Now, I don't imagine that there is more than ten dollars in the blamed thing—not worth crackin', ye see—but it probly is full o' green goods litter'chewer, an' valuable ter him."

Tommy laid his hand on the knob of the safe and shook the door slightly.

"Solid as the rocks o' ages."

His band strayed to the top. There was a package there. He took it down and unfolded it. Inside was a gray wig and a false gray beard, together with a soft hat of rather ill-looking pattern.

"Stock in trade fer his nibs, the green-goods man," added the river thief, contemptuously. He then rolled up the things and tossed the package back, adding: "Them may do fer Hen Kneeland, but not fer me."

"Do for whom?"

"Hen Kneeland. He's the green-goods man.

With a sort of indifferent comprehension Graydon heard this name. It was very familiar, but his own affairs dwarfed Kneeland's just then.

The fugitives kept their places and waited long and impatiently. Nobody came near to disturb them, but it was hours later when Tommy finally asserted that they might then go forth in safety. He caught at a ring in the low ceiling which had been invisible to Graydon, drew himself up and lifted the board. Both succeeded in reaching the floor above, and, from there, went to the street.

There was no one to molest them, and they walked over to Broadway and there separated.

A serious talk between them wound up the association for the time, but they agreed to keep each other informed. Graydon had no clear idea of whether he would keep the promise—just then all he cared for was to get home and think.

He went; he arrived there in safety.

Once in his private room he had abundant time and material for thought.

"I now have to face a new peril," he meditated, in alarm. "The thieves are broken up, and some one will betray me, I suppose. Truly, it was no bed of roses I assumed when I took Call's identity. I shall be arrested as leader of the river pirates. Will that be worse than Oliver Graydon's lot? But Graydon killed Walker Crosby! Come what may, I am Montgomery Call, leader of the thieves!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RANDALL SEEKS CONFIDENCES.

Mrs. GRAYDON and Rachel were in their private room when they had a visitor in the person of Joseph Randall. The detective had an honest, manly face, and no one could fail to say that it was an inviting face. As a friend of Rodney Proctor, too, he had, in their brief knowledge of him, won their respect, but, nevertheless, he was not one whose company was desired.

Officers of law were not to their taste just then.

Now, he was received with politeness, but he saw the under-current of reserve very clearly. For a time he talked quietly on immaterial subjects, but he had come on business, and he did not long delay in speaking of it.

"May I ask how you are getting on with your search?" he inquired, kindly.

"Very well," answered Rachel, with reserve.

"Not finished, yet?"

"Not wholly."

"Maybe I can help you."

"You are very kind, but we do not now need assistance. If we should do so we shall be glad to recall your offer," diplomatically responded Rachel.

"Pardon me, if I speak further on the subject. I am aware that my friend, Rodney Proctor, has been allowed to help you somewhat. He is an honorable man, and, though he is my friend, he has never lisped one word of your affairs. That is correct, I assure you. Despite that, I have by chance learned much of your case—more, I believe, than you told Rodney, or he suspected. In brief, I know you are here to seek a relative accused of crime. Ladies, that relative is falsely accused!"

It was time to say something decisive, for he had thrown them into a panic. Having applied a wedge of reassurance, he went on rapidly.

"I am a detective, but I am not pledged to this case on the side of the county of New York. I am my own master; I can do what I please, as long as I keep my conscience clear. Madam," to Mrs. Graydon, "I have

absolute proof that your husband is innocent."

Mary Graydon sat bewildered. She and Rachel had talked so much about the necessity of caution that she was all bound up in the idea, and it clung to her even when she heard this declaration.

Rachel was even more alert.

"Really, Mr. Randall, we do not understand you," she replied.

"It is scarcely kind to assume that we have criminals in our family."

"If I prove them innocent—"

"Only those accused need that proof."

"Rachel, Rachel," interrupted Mrs. Graydon, "let the gentleman talk; he means us well."

"Indeed I do, madam; and, to prove it, let me tell all. I do not seek to learn your secrets, nor to make you divulge one thing. I merely say, listen to me and hear what I can tell."

"We will do it. Proceed!" added Rachel.

"Let me say bluntly that I know you are the wife and the daughter of Oliver Graydon—"

"We do not admit it!" cried Rachel.

"Pardon me; I do not now speak from your stand-point. Kindly let me say what I have to say, kindly let me assume what I do assume. You will not in any way subscribe to my claims by failing to deny them."

Rachel made a gesture bidding him proceed.

"You wish to find Mr. Graydon—"

"I have read the papers enough to know that they say Oliver Graydon is dead."

"Did you think so when you went to the Morgue?" swiftly asked the detective.

Rachel was speechless.

"Do not be alarmed," resumed Randall; "I am not your foe. When I received information which convinced me you were Mrs. and Miss Graydon, it occurred to me that the news of Graydon's death would send you to the Morgue, to verify or disprove the claim. I went there, too, and, by consulting the keepers, learned that a young lady exactly answering your description had been there to look at the body of the man declared to be Graydon."

Mrs. Graydon breathed heavily.

"Go on!" she faintly requested.

"How your husband looked, madam, I could not say, as he was unknown to me, but I do know you are still keeping up your search. That proves what I suspected—that Miss Graydon found that the dead man was not Oliver Graydon!"

"You are telling our story as well as your own!" cried Rachel, resentfully.

"Pardon me, again; do not be impatient. It is natural that you should refuse to abandon your caution. Now, hear me! Before I had the least clue to the whereabouts of the fugitive from Sing Sing, I had gained proof that Oliver Graydon was innocent. Ladies, the charge that sent him to Sing Sing was all a plot on the part of Walker Crosby; I have abundant proof of that. I have evidence in his own handwriting, and I have the evidence of tools he then used. I declare positively that I can prove Mr. Graydon innocent."

"Oh! if you can—if you can!" cried Mrs. Graydon!

"I can."

"Then I will bless you forever."

"One moment. Consider, if you please, that I am an officer. Consider, also, that an officer does not want to harass a man he knows to be guiltless. I know your husband is guiltless. Now, I know where he is, and so do you."

"What?"

"He is masquerading as Montgomery Call, and you have been to see him in Call's house."

"Oh, sir!"

"You know I am right. Now, let us join forces, and prove to him that he is innocent in our eyes, as well as in fact. Can you tell me why he is passing as Call, and how he has managed to do it?"

"Alas! I cannot!" replied the wife.

"We do not admit—"

Thus began Rachel, still cautious, but Randall interrupted with a gesture.

"I am utterly puzzled to understand this feature of the case, but out of the web of the mystery I extract this much: It was the body of Montgomery Call that was

identified by the police as that of Oliver Graydon, and, in some way, your husband, madam, has assumed his identity. How he could do it I cannot understand. Plainly, he knew of Call, and of his resemblance to the man, but all is mystery beyond that point. Can you enlighten me?"

"No, sir. Unfortunately, we cannot." "It was not Graydon who lay in the Morgue?"

"No," frankly answered the wife.

"I have assumed the task of setting this thing right. I assert that I can absolutely prove Graydon innocent. I might publish this thing to the world, but in the face of it, is his own apparent determination to cling to his character as Call. How did he receive you when you called there?"

"He denied that he was Oliver Graydon."

"Absolutely denied it?"

"Yes."

"And to the end?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is remarkable, but he does not know all; he does not know that his innocence can be fully established. Now, will you go to him again?—go with me, and with proofs of his innocence of all blame?"

"Gladly, gladly!" exclaimed Mrs. Graydon, her face glowing with hope.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A RIVAL DISPOSED OF.

It was evening, and three men and a boy stood on the corner of a down-town street. All are known in these pages. They were Joseph Randall, Rodney Proctor, Skimmer Nichols and Dickey Bond, the vagabond.

Dickey pointed to a certain house and remarked:

"That's the place, boss."

"Then I will visit it."

"We part here," added Dickey. "All we need ter do furder is ter swap wads. My pocket is empty, an' it yearns fer food with green on the back. Did ye say cash?"

Dickey held out his hand with his most winning smile.

"Mr. Bond," answered Randall, "you are not a man whose word would go far in court, or out of it, but there is enough corroborative evidence this time, so I will trust you. Here is your fee."

"Boss, I thank you. This sum o' greens will enable me ter skip ter the gay an' festive village o' Chicago, where I shall seek ter begin a new life."

"Better make it an honest one."

"Did you ever know me ter be less than honest? Never, sir; never! True, I have aided Perk Crosby a bit, but I didn't know his intentions was dishonorable. I helped Mike O'Smith steal pretty Hope Trull, when she an' her mother first come ter N'York. You see, Crosby hired us ter do that because he wanted ter head off Hope an' her mother, an' work Monty Call fer cash, an' the women was goin' too fast toward findin' Monty, themselves, so he tried ter head 'em off. Mike an' me stole her for him, an' a nice duckin' we got in the drink when these two gents, Roddy an' Skimmer, tackled us on the East River. Then I did try ter sell Perk a stolen paper. It was me who stole it, but I took it from Henny Kneeland, who was a knave—".

"Rehearse your deeds no further."

"Wal, I am off. I skip N'York fer my own good. Partner, farewell!"

Dickey wiped his eyes with his sleeve, hesitated, half held out his hand, and then abruptly hurried off.

"Wal, he's a cooler!" exclaimed Skimmer.

"Dickey is picturesque in his rascality, and, though he well deserves arrest I shall let him go on account of his help now to us and that same picturesqueness. Follow me!"

The detective led the way, and his companions came close after. To the basement of the marked house they went, and then Randall produced a key and applied it to the door. The latter was readily opened, and they passed inside.

They were in utter darkness, but they had been told that the house was of the orthodox pattern, and they made their way without difficulty.

Slowly and carefully they toiled upward, and finally arrived on the floor from which

the light had streamed. Randall cautiously approached the door.

He could dimly hear voices within.

He ventured to try the door of an adjoining room. It was not fastened, nor did the room have an occupant. He passed inside, followed by his allies, and sight of light visible over the transom led him on.

By placing a chair he obtained view of the room beyond. He saw Perkins Crosby and Henry Kneeland. They were by a table with glasses and a bottle before them, but it was Henry who did the drinking—Perkins was not a man to indulge to any extent.

Crosby was talking.

"Figure it as you may," he remarked, "we are bound to gain by this. The man of double life will play well."

"I can hardly believe that Montgomery Call is really Oliver Graydon," replied Henry.

"I don't wonder. Graydon had been killed and buried by the police. It is hard to think him alive. Still, I have proof. It set me to thinking when I followed Mrs. Graydon and Rachel to Call's house—"

"You may be mistaken as to their identity."

"I am not. The mutual friend of my brother Walker and myself has positively identified them for me. It is Graydon's wife and child. Yes, and they went to visit Montgomery Call. When I traced them there I marveled. Then it came over me that Call resembled somebody else I had seen. Next, I happened to look at a newspaper which had a picture of Oliver Graydon. Then it all flashed over me."

"How do you account for his being in the shoes of the man who has all along been known as Montgomery Call?"

"I don't account for it; I can't account for it. I wish Walker Crosby was here to tackle the conundrum."

"Where do you think Walker is?"

"Kneeland, I am greatly puzzled over Walker's case. I fear something has happened to him."

"I hope not."

"So do I. Still," slowly added Perkins, "if he is dead I am his next of kin. I could endure his death, perhaps."

"Ha, ha! I reckon so. Well, you mean to bleed Call, anyhow?"

"He must pay for safety."

"When shall you see him?"

"To-morrow."

"Well, I am ready to do all you request, and I will obey your orders as laid out."

"To-morrow, then."

"So be it."

Joseph Randall stepped down from his chair.

"I am not going to have those knaves get ahead of my own game," he observed, quietly. "It is vice against virtue, and virtue will win if it can. I am going to arrest Crosby."

"With what shall you charge him at the police station?" asked Rodney.

"He is not likely to see the station to-night," grimly replied the detective. "I can charge enough against him, but I do not want to spring my case prematurely. I shall simply abduct the fellow, now, and shut him up until wanted. It is irregular, but he will have to endure it. Come!"

Randall had quietly tried the door. He now threw it open. He walked into the room, followed by Rodney and Skimmer.

The detective had been prepared only to demand a surrender and enforce it quietly, if possible, but he had to deal with a man who knew that the presence of an officer meant danger to him. Kneeland recognized him at once, and moved with corresponding quickness.

He blew out the light. The room became dark.

There was a rush of heavy feet.

Randall realized that the scheme of the green-goods man was to rush past them, and he moved accordingly. He and Kneeland encountered each other in the dark. They grappled fiercely.

"Look to Crosby!" was the detective's order.

Then there was struggling all over the room, but it lasted only a few minutes. Somebody scratched a match and the lamp was relighted. It was Skimmer who had done this, and he looked around eagerly.

He saw both Randall and Proctor holding fast to Perkins Crosby, but there was no sign of Kneeland.

"Say!" cried the boy, "one o' yer pets has skipped the tra-la-la!"

"Let him go," answered the detective. "It was an accident, but we have the man we want most. Mr. Crosby, you will not make your big trial to-morrow. It is doubtful if you win any money out of Montgomery Call. We have you, and you will stay with us!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I AM NOT THE MAN!"

THE convict impostor was in his room the next day, engaged in reading the papers. The occupation palled on him, and he threw the sheet down.

"I will go out for a walk!" he murmured.

"True, all the police force may be watching for Captain Cinch, river pirate, but I can't stand this inaction. Ah! what would I not give to see Walker Crosby alive!"

He left the room and walked down-stairs. He went in a very thoughtful mood. He was much worried over the fresh troubles of Montgomery Call, and had been considering the advisability of securing all the money he could and fleeing to the West.

"Shall I do it?" he mused. "Shall I go?"

He reached the parlor floor. Just then a female servant came out.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I was just coming to see you, Mr. Call. You have visitors inside."

The convict knew it. He had looked through the door, and he saw Mrs. Graydon and Rachel.

When it was too late to retreat he saw that Mrs. Graydon and Rachel were not alone. He stopped short and grew alarmed as he recognized Detective Randall.

Joseph saw the recoil and the look of consternation, and quickly addressed the host:

"Be at ease, sir; you are among friends. No one here would do you harm under any condition."

Before saying this he had quietly swung the door to, so as to insure positive quiet, and they had the scene all to themselves.

Graydon said nothing, but his gaze went rapidly from one to another of the party. He was cornered and disturbed, but not shaken in his resolution. Rachel came forward gently.

"Father," she said, softly, "you know we all mean you well. And, mother is here."

She pointed, and the blind woman lost her control. She rose quickly and held out her hands.

"Oliver," she exclaimed; "Oliver, speak to me!"

Graydon started back as if from a ghost. He had been worried before; now, he became positively pallid.

"I—I do not know you!"

The words passed his lips, but only in a sort of husky whisper. His heart was torn.

"Pardon me," interrupted the detective, "if I now ask leave to speak. 'Mr. Call—if so you see fit to term yourself—you and I are men, and of mature years. We know the principles of business, logic and reason. Listen to me as man to man.'"

Graydon turned his leaden eyes on the speaker, but there was no light of hope in the orbs.

"I am here to tell you the truth; I am here with your loved ones, who would not injure you to save their immortal souls. I swear to you on my word of honor that I speak truly to you when I say what follows. I have absolute proof that Oliver Graydon was innocent of the crime for which he was sent to Sing Sing—I can prove it before all the world."

Then the escaped convict replied in a voice which sounded far away:

"I do not know why you come to me about this, but, since you do, I will simply say that I am told Oliver Graydon is dead."

"He lives, and lives a man whose reputation is cleared. Walker Crosby planned to ruin him, and he did so at the time; but, now, things are different. I can prove that Graydon went to prison innocent. I will prove it before all the world, too!"

"If—if this Graydon had a family it will be good news for them."

"Do you not believe me when I say I can prove his innocence?"

"I do believe."

He spoke the truth. He believed, for there was conviction in the whole circumstance, and in those engaged in it. He believed, but his thought remained the same:

"I cannot accept the chance. Graydon killed Walker Crosby; Graydon is dead. He must remain dead!"

Randall was enough of a reader of human nature to see that their host was not shaken in his determination. Graydon had said well when he so repeatedly assured himself that "they did not know of Walker Crosby." They did not know, and, having no clue to the mystery of his conduct, they had arrived at the conclusion, fully, that his mind was deranged.

They had come prepared to try to convey the truth to such a mind.

The detective began to realize that it was a hard task.

He assumed the most convincing tone possible, and told the story in full of how he had established the innocence of the convict. He produced the papers in Walker Crosby's writing which told of the plot against Graydon, and proved his innocence, now; he brought out the affidavits of men who confessed they had been party to the plot, knowing Graydon was innocent.

All these papers were handed to Graydon, now, and, at the request of the detective, Graydon examined all.

He looked; he was convinced; yet his manner remained apathetic. He was cleared, but he could not avail himself of the fact. He remembered Walker Crosby.

Presently he looked up from the last of the papers.

"It must be pleasant for the wife and child of this Graydon to see him cleared," he remarked. "I regret, for their sake, that he died before his innocence was established."

"He did not die. You are Oliver Graydon."

"I am not the man!"

"I implore you—"

"I am Montgomery Call!" asserted the convict with stolid firmness.

Stubborn was the declaration, and Mrs. Graydon and Rachel were filled with despair. Randall knew he had the most difficult task he had undertaken in a long while, but he persevered. With all the logic and persuasion he could command he argued the case and tried to convince the man he believed to be deranged.

He failed. For a long time the convict listened with an appearance of patience; then he withdrew Montgomery Call's watch from his pocket, noted the time and politely remarked:

"I shall have to ask you to excuse me now. I have an engagement and can delay no longer. I regret this mistake of yours, but, of course, I am not responsible for it. Kindly excuse me."

He moved toward the door.

Rachel glanced toward Joseph. Like her mother she was in despair. The detective made a motion enjoining caution, and they accepted the situation the best they could, outwardly. Graydon accompanied them to the street door and bowed them out.

They went, and Randall's expression was bewildered.

"Can there be an error?" he wondered. "These women ought not to be mistaken, yet, if this man is Graydon, how did he get so firmly installed as Montgomery Call? Can it be we are all mistaken?"

He would not have asked the question if he could then have looked into the impostor's private room. Graydon lay on the bed, writhing in mental anguish.

"Lost, lost!" he groaned. "Paradise is within my reach, and I must reject it. Graydon is cleared, yet I can never be he. He has killed a man. Wife, child, honor—all I hold dear, farewell!"

It was an hour before he could think clearly. When he did, he turned to his latest conundrum—should he flee from New York?

He had not decided this question when Bildad brought in the evening papers. The impostor there found a new sensation. Surmounted by glaring head-lines was an account of the latest developments in the matter of the river pirates, and in the midst of the article, itself, he found these sentences:

"The police have ample proof that this gang has been led by a man of far different rank in life than the miserable roughs who were captured. The real leader is said to have been a man rich, well known and respected by all. It is believed that some of the river thieves have confessed fully, and new arrests are to be looked for shortly."

Graydon dropped the paper.

"That settles it; I must get out of New York. I will go—But they will be watching every point. How can I do it? Now, if I could assume a disguise—Ha! the vault! I have the idea!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A WILD EXPERIENCE.

It was dark when a human figure approached a house in the lower part of the city. The man named tried to walk with a natural air, but fear and guilt will tell—he skulked, rather than walked. Despite his fears he was not accosted by any policeman.

He reached the house; he entered quietly by a side door which was not fastened; he went on in the dark; he fumbled at the floor and raised a board; he dropped through the aperture thus made; he searched for and found a lamp; he made a light.

Oliver Graydon was revealed by this feeble break in the darkness.

He looked around sharply.

"All is well thus far. I have evaded the police, and this vault is as Tommy Carroll and I left it. Now to see if the disguise is here."

He went to the safe; he found a package there; he unrolled it; the gray beard and wig shown by Tommy Carroll was still there.

"Good, good!" he exclaimed. "I will put them on—"

He stopped short. He had seen a chair a few feet away.

"That was not here when I was with Tommy. Somebody has been here since! Is there danger? Pshaw! probably Kneeland has run in. I will not be a coward."

He put on the disguise. He had taken the precaution to wear rather uncouth, coarse clothes, and with the false beard and wig he was well shorn of his usual appearance. He seemed to be a man of about seventy years.

"I have no glass to look in, but I am of the opinion that I am well disguised. Now let me get out. I will hasten to Jersey City, buy a ticket for Chicago and—"

He stopped short. Alarm flashed over his face."

"Footsteps! I must hide!"

The only place possible was a small recess partially back of the safe. He hastened to blow out the light and enter this niche. Immediately after it occurred to him that the heat of the lamp-chimney would betray him, but luck was with him even in this.

Those who came bore a lamp of their own, and seemed to need no other.

"Kneeland!" murmured Graydon.

It was Kneeland, and with him was Mike O'Smith, the former a friend of Dickey Bond. Henry did not appear to be in good humor. He set the lamp down heavily and snapped to Mike:

"Get your matches ready, and don't be all day about it."

Mike meekly obeyed.

Neither of the men suspected the presence of a third party, and Kneeland began to fumble at the lock of the safe.

"It is a rotten shame that all this has happened so!" he declared. "I would just like to get a revolver pointed at that cursed Randall for a few seconds, but I can't; I must flee from New York like a hunted mad-dog."

"Hard lines, boss," agreed Mike.

"May destruction overtake Randall."

"Well, you hev all yer money, boss."

"I'd like to know where it is."

"Why, in this safe."

"Not a dollar!" declared Henry. "I have lived a fast life, and all I have made has been frittered away. There is nothing in here but papers—documents relating to my life in the green-goods line, and I want to burn them ere I go so they will not damn me, later on."

Kneeland was nervous, and the combination-lock did not answer his demand as readily as usual, but, at last, he forced it open.

The door of the safe swung back. He plunged his hand in and took out a lot of printed papers.

"Bait for guys!" he exclaimed, with a bitter laugh. "It was printed with high hopes, but the whole thing has gone to the dogs. Get a place ready, Mike, and we will have a bonfire soon going."

O'Smith came close, and he peered into the safe with greedy eyes.

"Take them to the fireplace in the next room," added Kneeland, not noticing the mood of his ally.

Mike picked up a lot of the circulars and went out with them.

Kneeland continued to fumble in the safe, assorting the things with practiced hand. Mike returned. Graydon had better view than Henry, and he wondered why Mike bore a club in his hand. Mike came closer.

"Take these," directed Kneeland, not looking up.

Mike's eyes glittered, and he suddenly swung his club up. It fell, and Henry dropped to the floor. The assailant was not satisfied with one blow, but he rained others upon his victim. Finally he paused; Henry lay still. The victorious ruffian laughed harshly.

"You needn't tell me there ain't no money in that safe!" he exclaimed. "There must be money there, an' I will hev it. Yes, I will, an' it will take me wal away from New York."

He ran out, but speedily returned with a big coil of rope. With a portion of this he bound his victim. Several yards of the stuff remained. He tossed it aside; then he dragged Kneeland's senseless form into the next room and returned.

All this Graydon had seen. He realized that Mike had turned traitor to Kneeland, and intended to rob the safe.

Mike swung the door of the safe out of the way, and then made a movement most unlucky to Graydon—it brought him into view of the tough. Mike stopped short, dumfounded with surprise and consternation. Of all things he had least expected to see another man there.

Graydon had witnessed enough of this scene, and, now he was discovered, it flashed upon him that his proper way was to make a rush for safety. He leaped out of his useless refuge and started. Mike gave a roar like that of a wild animal and sprung upon him. He bore Graydon to the floor and gripped hard at his throat.

Believing his life was at stake, Graydon struggled hard and they rolled about fiercely, fighting for the mastery. In this crisis muscle told, and the ex-convict felt himself losing all chance. A luckless turn brought his head against the corner of the safe and he was half stunned.

Quick-witted Mike improved the opportunity, and his hands flew with the readiness of an old operator. He lifted Graydon; he thumped him down in the chair; he used the remainder of the rope and bound him there securely.

He surveyed his new victim with grim satisfaction.

"There you be!" he exclaimed. "I don't know who in thunder you be, but I have you solid. You won't work no scheme on me."

Graydon struggled to throw off the incubus upon him.

"Man," he replied, "release me and I will pay you well."

"No, sirree; you will stay right in that chair."

"But money—"

"I'll get money there," and Mike pointed to the safe.

"I am in haste—"

"Haw, haw! Be you? Wal, so be I, an' you kin set thar an' see my way o' rushin' things."

The big tough was master of the situation, and intended to keep his grip.

He turned to the safe.

"Now fer the booty. I'll make a glorious haul!"

"Stop!"

It was another voice, stern and commanding, and Mike wheeled in dismay. By the door was a man chiefly noticeable for rags and a profusion of bushy hair and beard; but he held a revolver firmly, and the muzzle bore on Henry Kneeland's treacherous friend.

"Hands up!" added the ragged man. "If you try to draw a weapon I will shoot without mercy!"

"Who—who be you?" mumbled Mike.

"My name is Joseph Randall, and I am a detective. More than that you need not know, except that I am after you, just now."

Graydon's back was toward the speaker, but he recognized the voice. His head dropped low.

"Lost!" he murmured. "I am tracked down!"

Mike saw his opponent advance briskly.

"Surrender!" commanded the disguised detective. "Your day is over, and your plans are baffled."

Mike's courage went out. He became passive through consternation, and Randall snapped handcuffs on his wrists with the celerity of long practice. This done, the detective turned to Graydon and cut his bonds.

"Be at ease," he kindly directed. "Your troubles are past."

The ex-convict turned his dull eyes on the speaker, but said nothing.

"Rodney Proctor, Skimmer and others are with me, but all are your friends; you need not worry," pursued Joseph.

"Will you let me go free?" asked Graydon, eagerly.

"Free?"

"Out of the city! If need be, out of the world!"

"Be calm," replied Randall. "Your mind is not right, Mr. Graydon. You need the best of doctor's care, and it shall be yours. Rest and loving care will bring you around—the care of your wife and daughter."

"Lost!" moaned Graydon, and his head again dropped on his breast.

He believed he could see the future already. He was a prisoner now, and his misguided friends would insist upon keeping him secure—more, they would insist upon publishing his innocence of the charge of embezzlement to all the world.

"Then," thought the unhappy man, "it will come out that I killed Walker Crosby, and ruin will come to me and disgrace to my dear ones."

He saw other men in the room—Rodney, Skimmer and two others—but he gave them no heed. Only one thought was in his mind.

"Lost!" he again muttered, bitterly.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN ENEMY'S FINAL EFFORT.

In the house where Mrs. Graydon and Rachel made their home, and in their private room, the next morning, a notable party was gathered. It consisted of two ladies, Oliver Graydon, Joseph Randall and Rodney Proctor. The ex-convict was in the hands of his friends, and they were seeking to rid him, in a measure, of his supposed mental trouble by kindness and good care.

He had talked but little, and, when he did, he held doggedly to his usual assertion—he would not admit that he was Oliver Graydon.

In the midst of a conversation a servant came to say that a gentleman wished to see Mrs. Graydon.

"It is doubtless one of my fellow-detectives," remarked Randall. "I expected some messages, and I directed them to inquire for you, and, in case I was not here, to leave word with you. Katy, show him up."

The servant went out, and there was a short delay. Then footsteps sounded and the door re-opened. A man crossed the threshold and then stopped short. He had not been told that any one but the ladies were there, and sight of others was not to his taste.

Randall looked in wonder. The man was very much like Perkins Crosby in appearance, yet it was not he, and the detective had Perkins under lock and key. His mild wonder was quickly dispelled by something else.

Oliver Graydon uttered a loud and startled cry. He leaped to his feet; he stared at the new comer as if at a ghost; he grew pale as death; his eyes protruded, and he was plainly unnerved wholly.

Then his lips parted and two words passed them:

"WALKER CROSBY!"

He made no mistake. Walker Crosby was there in the flesh, and as much surprised as

he. But the arch-plotter had not the terror of his hated companion to confront, and he was soon over with it. He advanced a few steps, his ugly face growing triumphant, and he exclaimed in a gloating way:

"So you are here, too! I expected to see only the cubs, but I am glad to see the wolf, also. Oliver Graydon, your day is past. I am here, and the account will be squared now. Escaped convict and embezzler, there is more against you this time. I accuse you of trying to murder me by the river!"

He paused for a moment, but nobody was ready to answer him. Mrs. Graydon and Rachel were terribly frightened, and Randall was amazed by what he judged to be the situation.

Thus, Walker Crosby was allowed chance to go on, and he did it willingly.

"Oh! you thought to rid yourself of me when you did that vile deed, didn't you? You struck again and again with the knife, but luck was not with a murderer; in your mad haste your blows went wild. I fainted, and then you had it all to yourself. I can see, now, that you bore me out in the river and threw me overboard, for, when I recovered consciousness I was struggling in the water."

He made a gesture of hatred, and went on rapidly.

"Knavel you thought me dead, but I was not, and when you threw me into the river the water revived me. I was no mean swimmer, and I set out to reach the bank. I did it, too."

Evidently he wanted somebody to say something, but even Randall was speechless.

"I was almost dead then, but I managed to crawl to the hut of a fisherman. I had only one knife-wound on me, and that was slight; but, much as I wanted to pursue you, I could not. I fainted repeatedly, and was put to bed by the fisherman. What do you think followed? Why, in the natural course of events, a fever, and it was a long while before I regained consciousness."

Again a gesture expressive of his hatred; then he resumed:

"When consciousness returned I decided to wait until I could manage my own affairs. I did so; I am now recovered; I have come to New York. Letters left at my address by my brother Perkins told me that the wife and daughter of Oliver Graydon were living here, and I came to see them. I did not expect to see their beloved Oliver, but I am glad to meet him. Glad, because now my revenge will be completed; and the would-be murderer handed over to the officers of law!"

It was a malignant threat, but Graydon did not heed it. He turned his eyes upward, and through his tremulous lips came these words:

"Merciful Father, I thank Thee I am not a murderer!"

"Ay, but you tried to be, and you will be dealt with accordingly!" declared Walker Crosby.

Thus far Joseph Randall had been passive, but he had grasped the situation, and he now moved to the front.

"Wait, Mr. Crosby! If you press this charge against Graydon I will prove that you conspired to send him to prison on a false charge of embezzlement."

"I will go, if need be," cried Walker, "but he shall go for a longer period. He tried to kill me."

"Wait, Mr. Crosby," icily added the detective. "Your whole life has been one of crookedness. How about the Morrison case? How about the Turner case?—"

Walker grew pale.

"Destruction! how knew you of those things?"

"Certain papers of yours were recovered from the river outside New York by one Henry Kneeland—a chance discovery of his. I never understood how they came there, but I can now see they floated down, after slipping from your pocket, the night Graydon cast you into the river. Fool! you trusted too much to paper. I have looked into your case since getting the clues, and now I am ready to deal with you. I shall press the case against you for wrongfully sending Graydon to prison. This will mean about five years for you under lock and key, in the same prison to which you sent Graydon."

"But I will send him—"

"Try it, if you dare!" flashed Randall. "Try it—make one charge against him—and I will press all other charges against you, and, my word for it, you will spend the whole of your remaining life in Sing Sing. You will drop the charge that Graydon tried to kill you!"

Walker Crosby was frightened.

"Who—who are you?" he faltered.

"A detective!"

"A detective? Ruin!"

"Will you promise not to charge Graydon with assaulting you?"

"Yes, yes; if you never will mention the other cases. Spare me, spare me! I was too hard on Graydon, but I meant no harm!"

He was then a craven wretch, and, Randall, enlightened by this revelation, turned to Oliver Graydon.

"I think I see more clearly now. Do you still deny your identity? Are you Call or Graydon?"

The ex-convict rushed forward and clasped his wife to his arms.

"Mary, Mary!" he cried. "My own devoted wife! I can again touch you without soiling you, for I am not a murderer. May God be praised, for all this is His work! Mary—Rachel—the sun shines again, and there will be no more strange conduct on my part. I am saved, saved! Wife, child, come closer to me—I am Oliver Graydon, and I am a man that can look you in the face. Saved! saved!"

The mysterious detective case was ended. How did it leave those who had taken the most prominent parts therein?

The Sing Sing Prison roll was soon increased by these names: Walker Crosby, Perkins Crosby, Henry Kneeland, Mike O'Smith, and divers of the river thieves.

The Crosby brothers were tried on certain crimes, with others held in abeyance. Walker weakened wholly at his trial, and fully confessed that he had sent Oliver Graydon unjustly to prison for embezzlement. As he said nothing of the assault by the river, Randall kept his pledge and pressed no outside crime.

The revelation was the wonder of the town, and Oliver Graydon and Montgomery Call were the talk of all. Call was dead. Of that there could be no doubt. Certain things done by him before his trip down the river left no doubt on one point—he had deliberately leaped overboard, and had died a suicide.

His money affairs were at low ebb, and when Mrs. Trull proved that she was his wife, she received just enough to give her and Hope an income that would keep them from actual want. They decided to remain in New York, and did so. They lived frugally and respectably.

Oliver Graydon, cleared from an accusation, was a free and a happy man, united to his loved ones, and unmolested by anybody. Mrs. Graydon's turn for the worse in the matter of blindness was due to anxiety for her husband. Properly treated again, and free from worry, she fully regained her sight.

The ownership of the cottage supposed to be Graydon's was put into court, and the title fully vested in Graydon's name and right.

Happiness was with the family. In the midst of it all they did not forget those who had brought about these results. Randall and Proctor were their heroes. Oliver gave Joseph the greatest meed of praise, but it was to be noticed that Rachel never added her voice when anybody was ranked higher than Rodney.

Graydon has never seen his old companion, Tommy Carroll, since the events narrated. Tommy and Dickey Bond still keep clear of the meshes of law.

Joseph Randall continues his career as a detective, and with much of renown. He has made Skimmer Nichols his aid.

In a happy home with his wife and Rachel, and Rodney near him, the ex-convict lies in honored peace, plenty and prosperity, never denying that he is Oliver Graydon now.

THE END.

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TETON TOM, THE HALF-BLOOD.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.